

# Homing in: Sensing, sense-making and sustainable place-making: Sensing, Feeling, Talking, Reflecting, Futuring

Report on the development of an Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funded Arts and Social Sciences Collaborative Network

Dr Ria Dunkley  
February 2014



environmental  
futures  
dialogue  
*making sense of sustainability*

## **Acknowledgments**

Our appreciation goes to those who helped to make the events possible through performance, attendance or organisation. We would especially like to thank our collaborative partners John Barry, Clare Blundell Jones, Steve Bottoms, Stefhan Caddick, Gareth Clark, Andy Dobson, Jony Easterby, Alice dal Gobbo, David Harradine, Lee Hassall, Wallace Heim, Sam Hubble, Rueben Knutson, Jessica Lerner, Jane Lloyd Francis, John McGrath, Tim O'Riordan, Nick Pidgeon, Luba Pirgova, Erin Roberts, Fern Smith, Ben Stammers, Tanya Saed, Rhodri Thomas, Simon Whitehead, Nicolas Whybrow and Chris Young for their collaboration throughout the duration of the project. We would also like to thank Sian Faire and Catrin Palfrey for helping in making the event possible.

## Contents

Acknowledgments.....	2
1.0 Introduction.....	4
1.1 Summary of the EFD Network Events .....	4
1.2 Key Insights Emergent from the Network .....	5
1.3 Signposting Future Directions .....	5
2.0 An Arts-Social Science Methodology .....	6
3.0 Summary of Events.....	11
3.1 Summary of formative events – June and July 2013 .....	11
3.2 Summary of WMC final event, December 2013.....	14
4.0 Discussion and Reflections on Transdisciplinary Engagement through EFD .....	17
4.1 Reflections: Sustainability, place-making, homing .....	18
4.1.1 Troubling home as bounded conservatism	
4.1.2 Spatial dimensions of home	
4.2 Reflection: Risk and futures.....	22
4.3 Aesthetics, emotion and affect .....	27
5.0 Concluding Thoughts and Future Directions .....	30
5.1 Key Insights .....	31
5.2 Next Steps for the network.....	32
6.0 References .....	33
7.0 Appendices.....	35
A. Promotional Leaflet.....	35
B. Aberystwyth Arts Centre Tablecloth jottings summary: 14th June 2013.....	36
C. Collection of Blog posts from Cardiff Creativity Café – 1: 16 <sup>th</sup> July World Café.....	38
D. Cardiff Creativity Café – 2 Tablecloth jottings summary– 23 <sup>rd</sup> July 2013 .....	42
E. Reflections from a Frustrated Poet – John Barry .....	45
F. List of Films at WMC event .....	48
G. Keywords and Provocations Document for Final Event .....	49

## 1.0 Introduction

Throughout 2013, a series of events were organised as part of an Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funded collaboration between the arts and the social sciences. This collaboration sought to explore novel way through which to make sense of sustainability and sustainable place making, by combining methodologies from the performance arts and qualitative social science. These events were led by the *Environmental Futures Dialogue* (EFD) team, established in 2012 and led by principle investigator (PI) Professor Karen Henwood (Cardiff University), together with co-investigator Dr Carl Lavery (Aberystwyth University and subsequently University of Glasgow) and research associates Dr Ria Dunkley (Cardiff University) and Dr Chris Groves (Cardiff University).

The collaboration was driven by recognition that the major societal problems of our time require interconnected, collaborative efforts to creatively and imaginatively address the risks, instabilities, uncertainties and rapid pace of change in human-ecological relationships. Climate scientists continue to warn of the effects of dangerous climate change. Social scientists and policy makers seek alternative strategies capable of promoting better science-public communications, greater community resilience and social sustainability. Simultaneously arts practitioners and arts scholars have a long history of engagement with ecological themes, explicitly beginning with the land art movement of the 1960's (Weintraub, 2012). Yet ecological engagement has also at all times been central to artistic practice, whether as present in the poetry of Keats and Byron, or the works of Shakespeare. This collaboration was formed on the basis that there may be possibility to create a new, more holistic and inclusive space for knowledge formation and representation, by combining existing means of knowledge formation and representation using in our respective disciplines.

With this overarching goal in mind, the twelve-month project had the following four specific aims:

- i) To develop a cross-disciplinary approach explicitly combining arts and humanities and social science perspectives and methodologies for studying sensing, sense-making and sustainable place-making;
- ii) To explore the potentials of research into the ecological affordances of the creative connections people make with home (oikos) by bringing together artists, communities and humanities/social science researchers to demonstrate and reflect on their working principles and practices;
- iii) To identify and develop established and leading edge strategies for exploring ecological meanings and affective practices in everyday life, and their usefulness as part of knowledge synthesis and evaluation;
- iv) To encourage the responsiveness of individuals and communities to environmental change by fostering a sense of care crossing local, regional and global scales, and to increase capacity within communities to act in ways that can help promote their environmental connections and imagination.

## 1.1 Summary of the EFD Network Events

Over the course of 12 months we organised and participated in four networking events across Wales. The first was at *Aberystwyth Arts Centre*, in Aberystwyth in June 2013. This was

followed by two further gatherings in July 2013, at *The Gate* Art Centre, in Cardiff. Finally, in December 2013, we came together at the *Wales Millennium Centre (WMC)* in Cardiff, for a two-day symposium. The final event represented both a scaling-up of our activities, as well as acting as a space for consolidation and reflection on past events and the complete project. To facilitate the longevity of the network, we also maintained a database containing contact details of interested members of the arts-social science community. We connected regularly with this group through newsletters and publicised information about our activities on our project blog (<http://blogs.cardiff.ac.uk/environmentalfuturesdialogue/>). This was crucial to developing the identity of the network, which was also nurtured through the creation of a project logo (see front cover of this report), an events photo-bank and printed materials promoting our activities (see appendix A an example).

Through the course of the year, our network list grew to over 130 individuals from 86 academic and artistic institutions. Participants occupied a number of roles and membership included creative directors, individuals from environmental and social non-government organisations (NGOs), as well as independent artists and academics from a range of disciplines, including geography, performance studies, psychology and philosophy. Approximately 50 people participated in the event at *Aberystwyth Arts Centre* in June 2013, while another 30 attended each of the ‘Creativity Cafes’ held in July 2013 at *The Gate Arts Centre* in Cardiff. Over the course of the two-day Symposium at the WMC in December 2013, 64 people were in attendance, many of whom had been to one or more of the previous events.

## 1.2 Key Insights Emergent from the Network

Beginning our efforts to make sense of sustainability through creative collaboration, we established a set of keywords that would shape conversations at all of our events and our wider collaborations. The chosen keywords were ‘*risk*’ and ‘*futures*’, ‘*aesthetics*’, ‘*emotion*’ and ‘*affect*’ and ‘*sustainability*’, ‘*place-making*’ and ‘*homing*’. The methodology of identifying and reflecting on our keywords through our events is discussed in more detail in section two of this report, while our summary reflection on event outcomes under the guidance of these keywords is provided in section four.

## 1.3 Signposting Future Directions

As a product of our arts-social science collaboration there have already been a number of tangible outcomes. The collaboration has led to further involvement of members of the *EFD* team in related research projects and networking activities. For example in 2013, all members of the group contributed to discussions at the ‘*Developing Capacity in Multimodal Research, Community Engagement and Energy Demand Reduction*’ event held at Cardiff University, as part of the *Energy Biographies* project (for which Professor Karen Henwood is PI). Furthermore, members of the *EFD* team have contributed to workshops outside of their home institutions and disciplines to share learnings from their involvement in this project. We have also shared our learnings widely throughout the funded period by regularly contributing to organisational newsletters and to both our own blog and to those of our partner organisations.

At the final event, a number of suggestions were made for encouraging the progression of the *EFD* network. Most prominently, this included a call to widen collaboration to include more

diverse audiences. Resultantly in July 2014, we hope to contribute to the *AHRC Connected Communities Festival*, which will be held in Cardiff. We also have future plans to co-edit a volume of core published papers based on our key themes. Furthermore, we aim to devise strategies, working with the Welsh Government, to engage with, members of the public and communities, drawing from the lessons learnt through our events.

## 2.0 An Arts-Social Science Methodology

Through our network we aimed to make sense of sustainability by focusing more upon stories, tropes and the ephemeral rather than on more obvious forms of ecological art. We take up such stance, conscious of contemporary critiques of the instrumentalisation of both the arts (Belfiore and Bennett 2007, Jelinek 2013) and the social sciences (Lather 2013), and aware of what can be gained from reading for sustainability at a deeper structural level (Archer, Turley and Thomas 2013), as well as the emergent properties of arts events that make their wider benefits difficult to predefine (Heim 2003). We thus focused upon understanding artworks that are more oblique, rather than taking a naive view of what the arts can do *for* sustainability. Moreover, we set out to reinterpret what counts as data and to consider novel ways of data gathering, to make progressions in the fields of qualitative and performance research. As readers or interpreters of performance texts, we have sought to catch glimpses of the wider social and cultural meanings that are attributed to them by the artists and scholars who initiate them, as well as their wider audiences. Through our reflections on our events we aimed to be inclusive of the many voices that shared the network space, presenting findings in ways that did not privilege the researchers voice, but work ‘upward and outward from the concrete to the larger set of meanings that operate in a particular context’ (Denzin 1997: 247). Importantly, through ascribing such meanings, we were not looking for generalisable concepts, but rather meanings that could contest as well as support one another, providing a thick description (Geertz 1973) of the role of the artworks in sustainability sense-making. The results are thus messy, interpretive and performance-based texts, which allow us to be more attentive to nuanced understandings of sustainability.

Making sense of sustainability, in a transdisciplinary context, principally required openness in appreciating the methods of our respective fields. We therefore aimed to explore the role of the affective and the aesthetic as sense-making processes, as co-performers and co-producers of knowledge. Seeking ways to embody each other’s disciplines, we devised methods of interaction and inquiry that were novel to each of us. We staged performances that allowed us to gain a greater understanding of the ecological-based performance arts, including film showings, narrative and poetic readings, exhibitions and monologues. We also held *World Café* style discussions at our events, as a means of capturing multiple readings of these performances, recording the events in ways that revealed that which was experienced through the senses of the many different individuals present. In doing so, we have drawn upon the field of performance ethnography, coming together as arts scholars, arts practitioners and social scientists to occupy a liminal space (Turner 1982), which allows us to reflexively engage with the cultural meanings that are embedded in texts. Through working in this transdisciplinary, liminal context, we adopted the viewpoint that ‘corporeality and textuality are not mutually exclusive representational modes in the field or in scholarly inquiry’ (Hamera 2011: 322). We thus construct this network in the

spirit of performance ethnographer Judith Hamera (2011: 322) when she states that dance is 'enmeshed in language' which makes understanding the way diverse communities dance key to understanding them. Thus 'dancing with' interlocutors is as significant as 'as listening to and writing about them'.



Figure 1 World Cafe Discussions at the WMC

In this liminal space, between and betwixt our disciplinary confines, we aimed to create opportunities for embodied, experimental and critical ways of sensing sustainability. This space had to be one that was legitimising and fulfilling for both the arts and social sciences. Consequently, it was crucial to devise an approach that would satisfy art practitioners and scholars who are more at ease with the concept of the ephemeral, and social scientists who have an overt responsibility for the knowledge creation process. Firstly, then we established a set of 'keywords', which enabled reflection on our key themes and shared concerns. Raymond Williams (1983, in Hamera 2011: 319) argued that establishing such key terms helps us to 'operationalize responsibilities for ethical and rigorous engagement'. In our case, keywords chosen for reflection through our events included '*risk*' and '*futures*', '*aesthetics*', '*emotion*' and '*affect*' and '*sustainability*', '*place-making*' and '*homing*'. Reflections on these keywords, resulting from our events were then captured using modes that emphasised movement and the animate, for example, through audio and film recording, blog posts, field notes, digital scrapbooks, and tablecloths and post-it notes, upon which our interlocutors recorded their thoughts and feelings visually, poetically and in prose summaries.

Through performance ethnography, performance itself is thought of as 'a method of inquiry' through which 'the researcher gives focused attention to the detonative, sensory elements of the event: how it looks, sounds, smells, shifts over time'. Understanding performance in this way was useful to us in terms of mobilising a research methodology that enabled us to interpret the diverse forms of data that we interacted with. In relation to the sense making process, Hamera's (2011: 320) appreciation of the concept of aesthetics as one of criteria 'and implicit social contracts that shape how performance and performance repetitions are perceived and



understood’ is particularly useful for working in a transdisciplinary context. Aesthetic consideration, Hamera (2011: 320) argues is not the preserve of the art world, rather aesthetics are ‘profoundly communal and political...inseparable from lived experience, and the imaginative work of meaning making’. Instead they are best understood as ‘a set of interpretive and expressive strategies to be interrogated, deployed, or resisted’. Aesthetics are thus positioned at the centre of processes of meaning-making both in the appreciation of art works as well as, as processes relevant to everyday life. Artists, social scientists and art scholars are encouraged to reflect on works, whilst paying critical attention to the divergent lenses through which artists, interpreters and audiences view the world that shapes the creation of and response to ecological artworks. Not suggesting that such judgement is the preserve of any one distinct group, rather all individuals make aesthetic judgements, based on their subjective perspective. It is from this basis that we argue for including a wide diversity of voices within our research processes, which ultimately leads to a richer appreciation of how the arts play a part in making sense of sustainability.

Performance ethnography therefore offers a collaborative space that is non-representational, yet effective in processes of knowledge formation. For Hamera (2011: 326) this is achieved through the novelising of ‘the stage by including both multiple and contradictory voices...and multimedia’. Presenting multiple voices also places the burden of determining what is to be done with new knowledge on the audience, acknowledging that ‘collaborative interventions are not always seamless meetings of minds’. Performance ethnography therefore allows us to escape the concept of ‘solidarity authorship as an extension of the history anthropologist “hero”’ (Hamera 2011: 327). The approach thus challenges the identity of the ‘rescuing researcher’ (Lather 2013), displacing and repositioning her so that she might encounter the ‘brush with solidarity’ that Berlant (2011: 263) describes. Through taking a performance-based research approach, the encumbrance of measurement, driven by the necessity to identify definitively what needs to be changed in the world, is removed from both the social scientist and the artist. Spaces of performance ethnography therefore open up dialogue, presenting differences and contradictions together on stage, as a way of acknowledging the complexity of the modern world. To this end, Hamera (2011: 326) states that ‘sometimes just touching that distance by novelising ethnography is the best we can do, whether we speak, write, dance, or paint the performances we encounter’.

The emergent field of performance ethnography (Hamera 2011: 319) thus offers a transformative meeting ground for art-social science collaborations. As an approach, rather than offering a prescribed methodology, it recognises the significance of contextual negotiations, thereby providing a pathway towards the post-qualitative aspirations that Lather (2013) discusses. What is particularly useful in working in such a context is that ‘the subjunctive dimension of performance enables ethnographers to carry out meaningful research in investigating ‘what is, and imagine, inspire, and initiate what could be’ (Hamera 2011: 319). The approach intervenes ‘in our understanding of the world, and in the world itself’ (Hamera 2011: 327). This is facilitated by the familiar practice of theatre and performance artists in integrating ‘knowledge from multiple areas of expertise (specialise knowledge), the full scope of senses (embodied knowledge), critique (politically engaged conceptual knowledge), and pragmatic knowledge (know how)’ in order to inspire ‘poiesis’. To exhibit this, Hamera (2011: 323), refers to *Water Rites*, a performance that ‘demands the viewer to pay attention’ through characters that



call on them to ‘enact their commitments’. She argues that in the exhibited case, ‘*Water Rites* demonstrates how performance ethnography does more than represent the problematics of water privatisation; it intervenes in them’ (Hamera 2011: 325).

Performance-based ‘messy’ approaches to sense-making also complement the eco-literacy technique of ‘reading with the grain’ (Archer *et al* 2013), in seeking to ‘embed the reader (and analyst) in a [social] text’s multiple material and historic realities’ (Denzin 1997: 233). Contextual readings of research data sources do not impose a structural critique based on pre-decided concepts, as is the case with positivist and post-positivist research paradigms. Progressions in post-structural qualitative research advocate a greater attentiveness to text. Denzin (1997: 249) refers to such processes of attentiveness as the recovery of ‘lost stories’, encouraging the analyst to ‘hear the story as it was told’ avoiding methods of reading that ‘privilege the analysts listening ear’. Similarities can therefore be observed between the narrative approach to analysis and the attentiveness paid to socio-historic moments when we ‘read with the grain’, with both stances recognising texts not as mirrors of reality, but underpinned by a narrative logic that is gendered and socially and culturally constructed, reflecting the situations in which they were created, in accordance to time and place. Reflective of this, throughout our network we have attempted to initiate ‘experimental, experiential and critical readings’ that we accepted as ‘always incomplete, personal, self-reflexive and resistant to totalising theories’ (Denzin 1997: 246).

Gathering understandings of the oblique, involves too an appreciation of the context within which the creator lives or has lived, which influences the artistic process. For example, the works of Shakespeare are not commonly thought of as musing on sustainability themes and yet such themes are arguably embedded within his plays at a deep structural level. Archer *et al* (2013: 10) argue that ‘the politics of sustenance is written into the fabric, into the very grain, as it were, of Shakespeare’s characters, language and plots’. This is, they say, a result of the playwright having lived at a time of climatic disturbance and correlated food shortages, known as the Little Ice Age. ‘Thus by reading his plays ‘with the grain’, we are able to appreciate how the reciprocal relationships between humans and natural resources are mediated by ‘literary creativity, through which the environment authors its writers and those writers author the environment’. Archer *et al* (2013: 12) argue that such imaginative progressions in turn, help us to ‘think critically and creatively’ about the future through encouraging reflections on the past. Thus, rather than orienting ourselves via a didactic road-map for addressing environmental issues, we can more openly imagine the opportunities and risks that are before us, perhaps with a greater sense of agency.

In setting out to achieve this, we principally acknowledged that our central activity of **making sense of sustainability** involved not only considering more socially engaged artworks, but also more oblique artistic forms of engagement with environmental and sustainability themes, thereby rejecting the notion of the arts as merely representational. This involved being attentive to the capacity of the arts to create alternative forms of ecology based on the values and structures that guide the art world. Making sense of such practices, thus involved considering them in terms of their deeper cultural resonances, rather than through evaluating their direct social and economic impacts. Artistic engagement events, such as ours, that exist at the

boundaries, and could be regarded as ‘hybrids of activism, performance and conversation’, while perhaps not always fulfilling some predefined goal create opportunities for public dialogue that materialise from them. Thus they can allow the ‘unexpected to emerge, not in contradiction to the work’s purpose, but in an enrichment of them’ (Heim 2003: 184). It was therefore crucial that our means of interpreting such art works and encounters, also involved reading art forms for meanings that could be novel and unobvious.

Consequently, instead of developing arts-based methods or critiquing such methods as Lafrenière and Cox (2013) do, we are interested in exploring an alternative relationship between the arts and the social sciences. Evolutions in the qualitative research field encourage us to seek out new research methodologies in what Lather (2013) terms the ‘post-qualitative’ era. This era is characterised by a deeper questioning and exploration of newly accepted techniques within qualitative enquiry. The ‘post-qualitative’ era emerges from a situation after the field has become ‘centred, disciplined, regulated, and normalized as qualitative handbooks, textbooks, and journals create “moments” and “designs,” and fix the “research process”’ (Lather 2013: 635). Following the opening up of ‘concepts associated with qualitative inquiry’, resulting from postmodern theories, Lather (2013: 635) points us towards the future that is unknown and offers up possibilities through its indeterminacy. She suggests we currently inhabit an era when:

researchers who, weary of a decade of defending qualitative research and eager to get on with their work, again imagine and accomplish an inquiry that might produce different knowledge and produce knowledge differently. This inquiry cannot be tidily described in textbooks or handbooks. There is no methodological instrumentality to be unproblematically learned. In this methodology-to-come, we begin to do it differently wherever we are in our projects.

Like Lather (2013: 635) we are interested in exploring the question of: ‘What opens up if we position alternative methodology as non-totalizable, sometimes fugitive, also aggregate, innumerable, resisting stasis and capture, hierarchy and totality, what Deleuze might call “a thousand tiny methodologies”?’ In seeking to open up dialogue, leading to new collaborations and understandings that come from crossing disciplinary divides, we aimed to form the future of qualitative and performance-based research by asking questions about what data is, about the positionality of the researcher, about analytical and performance practices and what we can hope our research and practice might achieve. Pursuing a different starting point than the unequal – social scientist as evaluator of artistic works, or the equally uncomfortably position of the aesthetic judgement of arts-based social science, we pursued interactions that would be affirming for all partners. This involved an embrace of the shared messiness and fluidity of both artwork and social science as forms of knowledge creation.

In doing so, we resist the turn to realism in the social sciences (Adkins and Lury 2009), and qualitative researches’ arguable adoption of neoliberal ‘principles of limited government’ shaping a ‘Twenty-First Century’ ‘audit culture’ which emphasises necessity to prove the worth of activities (Lather 2013: 636). Such audit culture thinking is uninspiring to both the artist, who may face de-legitimation, and to the qualitative researcher, concerned that their research will also be reduced to an instrumental tool, reading for the needs of such culture (Lather 2013).

Thus, we argue here that though valuable, and while not discounting socially engaged artworks, a rationalist assessment of what represents good and engaging art, such as that which Lafrenière and Cox (2013) present, is a premature closing-down of dialogue amongst arts-social science communities and cautions against experimentation. Taking into account the contentions noted above, in both the arts and the social sciences, in relation to this relatively recent sharing of space, was thus a central tension and driver in the development of this network.

### 3.0 Summary of Events

#### 3.1 Summary of formative events – June and July 2013

The first network event, at *Aberystwyth Arts Centre*, occurred on the 14<sup>th</sup> of June 2013. The previous day, at the same venue, a related event had specifically focused on ‘Future Climate Dialogues’. During the day, a series of academics and educators took to the stage to explain how art could be used to share information, influence emotional response and incite action on Climate Change. Presenters expressed their concerns for issues such as the anthropomorphising of bees. They also critiqued the role of film in encouraging pro-environmental behaviours, and the use of artistic methods to engage wider audiences, for example, through presenting scientific data as information-graphics. The prominent narrative being that where traditional science communication was lacking, the arts might yet come to the rescue. Our event that followed, which many of the presenters and participants from the previous day attended, significantly contrasted, as a result of our focus on oblique art forms and the ephemeral in ‘reading for sustainability’ (Archer *et al* 2013). Creative self-expression led dialogue throughout the morning sessions. For example, Siriol Joyner and Simon Whitehead brought a sense of nature into the lecture theatre and performance space. The afternoon sessions saw the group unpick the meanings behind terminology through the first *World Café* discussion. Conversation centred around three keywords ‘*sustainability*’, ‘*homing*’ and ‘*aesthetics*’, as people from different disciplines and practices recognised and attempted to reconcile differing ways of seeing (see appendix B for a summary of tablecloth jottings).



Figure 2 Simon Whitehead and Siriol Joyner, Aberystwyth Arts Centre

This event was followed by two further gatherings in July, at *The Gate* Art Centre, in Cardiff. These events occupied slots held for the regular '*Philosophy Café*', which occurs every month. They also formed part of a Seminar Series entitled '*The Future of Wales*'. Performances and proceeding conversations developed reflections on three more of our keywords, '*affect*', '*risk*' and '*uncertainty*'. Three artists gave performances at the event, reflecting specifically on these keywords. Dancer Simon Whitehead spun a table on one of its legs, whilst maintaining a narrative concerned with our precarious position on a spinning globe. He created a mental image of how at different points in our own biographical histories we may be attached to different places upon that globe, but we are always attached to the earth as our home. Co-director of *Volcano Theatre* and *Emergence*, Fern Smith focused us on our occupied space, engaging us in a meditative practice, discussing the difficulties of remaining in the present, while the dual emotions of "*shame*", which critiques past actions and "*fear*", which projects imaginings and stifles actions stagnate the individual. The fundamental question, as one of personal wellbeing for Fern then was: "*how can I be here and stay in uncertainty?*" Fern discussed occupying the "*nowhere space*" that can be a "*good place to be*", rather than trying to force a certainty that you are not sure is desirable.

In contrast to this, Gareth Clarke, co-director of *Mr and Mrs Clark Theatre*, discussed how his community engaged arts-practice in the City of Newport was inspired by the *Occupy Movement*, after which he "*went looking for defiance*" in the city. What he found however, was two activists and a lot of people "*putting up*" with the things they were not happy with. Yet, in solidarity with Fern, Gareth had found that the main barrier to the people of Newport choosing their path into the future was their inability to tell authority what they wanted – "*gaffer tape*" had therefore "*become the new weapon of choice*". The people of Newport had seemingly therefore resigned to occupy the "*nowhere space*" that Fern spoke of, indefinitely. Occupying such space is therefore not always a restorative, meditative practice, particularly when people feel disempowered to do anything about their situation.

The three arts practitioners each asked a question of their audience that would inform the 'world café' discussions that followed. These were:

1. How can we imagine a better future when the present seems so bleak? (Gareth Clark)
2. What emotions keep you spiralling? How do they relate to uncertainty? (Fern Smith)
3. What is the relationship between uncertainty and trust? How does this relationship manifest itself? (Simon)

Chris Groves also added one further question:

4. What aspects of the future are most uncertain? How do these uncertainties make you feel?

For a summary of tablecloth responses, see Appendix C.

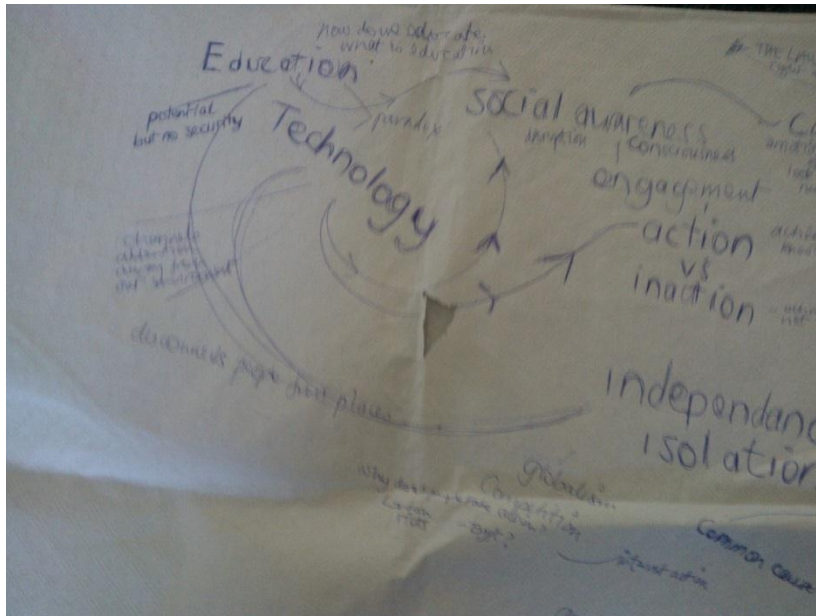


Figure 3 Cardiff Cafe Tablecloth

The final lead-up event was held on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of July, again at *The Gate* Arts Centre and developed the theme that storylines can help us to negotiate a future. The café discussion was framed through the presentation of three storylines for the future. Chris Groves introduced the session by presenting a binary view where either a natural world defeats humans or where humans triumph over a natural world. This binary is epitomised in the one case, by Stephen Emmott's (2013) message '*we're fucked*'. That is to say that the situation is so dire that without radical societal reform we are at an evolutionary dead-end. The other extreme being Eric Drexler's (1986) vision of a future that we have the power to create through harnessing innovative technology to engineer our way through the challenges we face. At this third event, actor and ecologist, Rhodri Thomas performed a monologue entitled '*Who's Afraid?*', the story of a lone wolf's progress through an unnatural city environment, as an underlying metaphor of the hyper-individualism that characterises urban life. This human disconnection from natural habitats creates a "*shape-shifting*" modern fear that knows no boundaries and divides communities. Rhodri's performance confronts us with our worst fears, suggesting that a vision of the future where we have averted disaster through technology and market innovations is merely a reincarnation of an ancient pointless faith placed in "*Gods and Idols*". Rather for Rhodri's alter ego *Taliesin Blyth*, lone wolf living is unsustainable because we cannot escape the reality is that everything is the environment and it is us. Thus as he states, "*if we screw it up, we effectively put a gun to our head and pull the trigger*". Rather than fearing strangers, or cancer, *Taliesin* is fearful of environmental catastrophe that awaits us. The evidence that emerges from ecological studies, of which Rhodri as an ecologist is very aware, is enough to make him "*very afraid*".

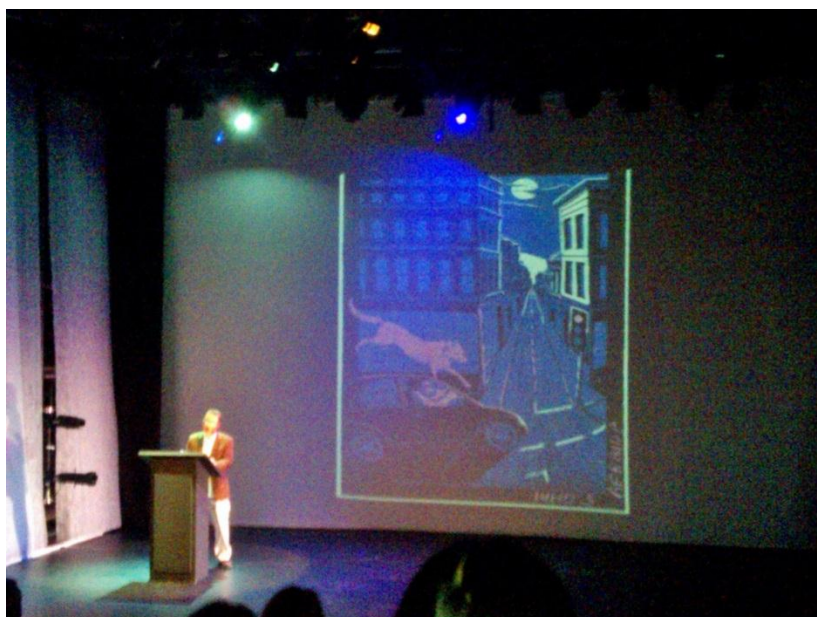


Figure 4 Rhodri Thomas performing "Who's Afraid?"

Following the performance the audience considered four questions in roundtable discussions:

1. What is your story of the future?
2. What do you want the future to be like?
3. Who are the protagonists of your future?
4. What's going to happen along the way?

For a summary of tablecloth responses see Appendix D.

### 3.2 Summary of WMC final event, December 2013

*A man peers out of his doorway on Bute Street, a litre of Daz washing powder resting on his window ledge. Though pretending to be picking up milk, he has come to find out what all the noise is about. A women on the other side of the road walks with a Ghostbuster-like petrol pack on her back, heavy, industrial, ear-defended. She is blowing a Tumbleweed down Bute Street.*

'*The Tumbleweed*' performance began our final event that took place on the 6th and 7th of December 2013 at the WMC. It was a performance that "*punctuates the habitual*" (Simon Whitehead 2013), disrupting the everyday and invited people to wander out and find *The Tumbleweed* and its blower. The performance sets the scene for an event that would take many of the delegates out of their comfort zones. Curated in collaboration with Simon Whitehead, the symposium included performances, film showings, monologues, poetry readings and open discussions. The first morning saw the EFD network team and their collaborators discuss with the audience how they had negotiated their workings in the transdisciplinary space over the course of the past twelve months. Attempts had been made to inhabit each other's spaces, while there was also evidence of individuals making changes to their practice or their perceptions as a result of the encounters. For example, Rhodri Thomas had altered the end of his performance '*Who's Afraid*', after having performed at the Cardiff Creativity Café.





Figure 5 The Tumbleweed

An expert panel of ‘environmental thinkers’ also provided feed-in to our activities during a formal session on the first morning, as well as through the roundtable discussions throughout the event, reflecting on our keywords in often surprising ways (see for example, Appendix E). The presence of these environmental thinkers gave a sense of context to the event, allowing us to appreciate the issues that are at stake in relation to Sustainable Science. They also served to value the importance of arts-social science collaboration, in both a way that appreciated the oblique artworks that we had been pursuing, as well as expressing an appreciation for more activist art. In support of this, for example, John Barry, Professor of Green Political Theory stated *“We are on the cusp of a world that could be appropriate for us and there is an opportunity for the arts to no longer be marginal and ephemeral”*. Professor of Environmental Sciences, Tim O’Riordan felt that art could give people (especially young people) confidence, to *“jump out of containment”* and pushed forward the idea of intergenerational creative conversations through drama or film, which offered an alternative to the reality that people are currently *“brutalised by carbon messaging”*. While, more specific to Climate Change, Professor of Environmental Psychology, Nick Pigeon drew attention to the significance of imagination, interdisciplinarity and action – all of which are crucial to creating a future that is not represented in the dystopic visions that are currently dominant in the media. Performance scholar, Steve Bottom’s called us to be more *“futurist”* and implicitly activist in our understandings of sustainability, while artist David Harradine troubled the idea of art being a *“helper”* for the cause of sustainability. Director of the *National Theatre for Wales* (NTW), John McGrath also felt it important that the arts were recognised not as a utopian space for making sense of sustainability, but as a discipline that is inevitably struggling with this *“becoming”* concept, or *“slow-moving crisis”* the solutions to which are not clearly visible.

Throughout the event arts practitioners presented their works and spoke around them. For example, through his presentation *‘The Medium is the Message’* artist Stefan Caddick, presented his substantial body of ecological-based works, including pieces such as The Nihilists, a comic reflection of the futility of the techno-fix, and Ghost Parade, a piece of performance art



that brought people back to a former steelworks in Ebbw Vale to coalesce symbolically, ten-years to the day following its closure. In reflection on his work, Stefan quoted John Hunt in stating:

Of course, just because affective or immaterial labour predominates under transnational capitalism, this does not mean that the physical labour of material manufacturing has ceased to exist. It continues, more relentless than ever – even if it is cybernetically regulated, and hidden away from our affluent eyes.



Figure 6 Stefan Caddick presenting his wind-powered 'We are all going to die' neon-signage

Stefhan's work opened up spaces for thinking about the past in order to shape the future, in the way that Archer *et al* (2013) describe as a valid means of reading for a sustainable future. Other performances pieces that reflected, more obliquely upon this process of learning from the past included 'Return to Battleship Island' (Lee Hassall and Dr Carl Lavery), a film about Hashima, an abandoned island of ruins near Nagasaki. Described as a "*film about waves*", it emphasises the temporariness of life on the island – the coming of life onto the land as monotonous ocean break, and the leaving again through the display of left behind school cards and typewriters. The presence of everyday objects is juxtaposed starkly with the total absence of the people who, we are told in the 'text image' that following the film had entered "*a devils pact*", working for *Mitsubishi* to enjoy life in what once was the "*capitalist paradise*" of Hashima. Reflecting on their work, Hassall and Lavery argue that the cinematic images that are capably of reconfiguring the world are those which are "*orphans who reject all fathers and mothers- images that are content to drift and float*" (For a full list of films shown at the event, see Appendix F).

The second day of the event focused to a greater extent on next steps for collaborations between artists and social-scientists. In the opening session, Professor Karen Henwood summarised the complications of encouraging a dialogue around possible futures, while during the day further discussions questioned whether it was the artists responsibility to mobilise people for sustainability, drawing on ideas introduced during the previous day. Moreover, the challenges of

arts-social science collaborations were discussed through allusions to interactions that pay only lip service to meaningful interaction, which as one participant put it, may constitute only “*the lipstick on the gorilla*”. Key reflections on what emerged from these discussions will be highlighted in the following section, together with a connection to themes from previous events.



Figure 7 Tablecloths at the WMC Symposium

#### 4.0 Discussion and Reflections on Transdisciplinary Engagement through EFD

As laid out in our methodology, making sense of sustainability, as a transdisciplinary process requires openness to the methods employed by each of our respective fields, as well as for each other's epistemic values. We had set out to provide a space within which we would be co-performers and co-producers of knowledge and one within which we would have opportunity for embodied, experimental and critical ways of sensing sustainability. Crucially, this space needed to be legitimising for individuals from different disciplines. In setting out to achieve this, our ‘keywords’ were established to guide our practice. Reflections on these key words formed the basis of the three events leading up to the symposium at the *WMC*. Prior to the *WMC* symposium, a document reflecting the major observations on our keywords was distributed to artists and environmental thinkers who reflected on their own works in the context of these terms. Throughout the finally event, a series of *World Café* style discussions also took the keywords into account (see Appendix G for the ‘keywords and provocations’ document).

Crucial to the success of the symposium was the lack of consensus on the narrative we had constructed surrounding the keywords we had chosen to focus upon. Individuals present at events, whether artist, performer, social-scientist, or environmentalist engaged with these keywords productively, drawing-out both what was both consistent and contradictory in the espousal of the importance of such concepts in relation to the lived reality of both the event and the wider context in which it took place. Within this section, we reflect on our keywords which constructed the three main areas of discussion at the *EFD* network events, by undertaking

readings of the data we have gathered, including jottings on tablecloths, sound recordings, digital scrapbooks, and photographs.

#### 4.1 Reflections: Sustainability, place-making, homing

From our very first event in Aberystwyth and indeed before this, we defined the concept of **home** in relation to the ancient Greek concept of ‘oikos’ and therefore in relational terms and in terms of connectivity. We defined home therefore more in the sense of being at home *with* something, rather than as a structure *within* which to live. More specifically, concepts of home and in particular processes of ‘homing’ have featured prominently in performances displayed and we have come to appreciate conception of home at three levels. Firstly, dance performances from Simon Whitehead and Siriol Joyner in both Aberystwyth and Cardiff encouraged us to think about the body as home and processes of “*homing to the self*”, through embodied experience and performance that reflect on lived-connections to the environments inhabited. Through these performances we have gained an uncanny sense of the connection of such places to the global scale, something that Simon described at the first Cardiff event through reference to the process that many Astronauts discuss in losing connection to a narrow concept of home as they begin to see the earth as home, through a process of “*identify with the planet*”. Secondly, we have concerned ourselves with the idea of place as home. In particular, for example, Steffan Caddick’s displays of his time-piece works at the *WMC* encouraged discussions of the decline of post-industrial towns in the South Wales Valleys, while ‘*Return to Battleship Island*’ reflected more obliquely on this theme abandoned places and what they communicate to us in the present. Thirdly, the idea of the globe as home was developed most explicitly in David Harradine’s piece – ‘*It’s the Skin You’re Living In*’, which drew connections between the human body and the endangered animal body to trouble our view of wilderness and nature as being separate from us humans and therefore of no social concern.

##### 4.1.1 Troubling home as bounded conservatism

As in the case of the second point above, home can be considered as a bounded. ‘Going home’, can be regarded as a form of nostalgic time-travel. For example, bell hooks (2009) describes how she had all her life thought of going home as ‘going back in time’, while Massey (2003) describes the road back home as ‘sloping backwards in time’. Yet there was a sense running through our events that *home* was perhaps an unhelpful metaphor when thought of a sort of idyll to which we seek a return, given that such a perspective could potentially stifle creativity and close off the outside world. For example, performance scholar Stephen Bottoms drew on Badiou (2001) to caution against the “*stodgy conservatism*” that stagnated concepts of home implied. He developed this into a critique of the *WMC* as a venue, which though originally intended to be a living room for the city of Cardiff (Pearson 2013), in his mind, was now anything but homely representing a “*front of a more conservative core*” as one participant put it.

Throughout the final event, there was a wider scepticism about nostalgic perspectives on home coming, which was highlighted by the enthusiasm for an alternative understanding of nostalgia, in accordance to the ancient Greek definition as “*the pain of come coming*”, put forth by David Harradine at the final event. Such an understanding was perhaps more readily accepted at the *WMC* event because of the locality, being at the centre of the regeneration of *Tiger Bay*, the



Cardiff Docks, that once witnessed the transportation of coal and steel from the South Wales Valley towns to the rest of the world but had suffered from stark decline in the later part of the Twentieth Century. Performances like *'The Tumbleweed'* created affective responses for the audience as they watched the performer encounter difficulties, as she negotiated "*the invisible line*", as one participant put it, that denoted the right to use the leaf blower to push the American Tumbleweed around what is now the privately owned land of *Mermaid Quay*. As the audience reflected on the capacity of regeneration efforts to displace communities, they also critiqued the assumption that economic growth driven development could be a panacea for social ills, something which Chris Groves developed in his blog reflections on the final event. The locality of *'The Tumbleweed'* performance (which had been performed previously in other cities) therefore took on a particular resonance in Cardiff Bay, which was specific to that context and allowed people to reflect on the failings of market led systems and their unsustainability, as well as troubling affective connections to home.

Moreover, Stefan Caddick dramatized how, for many homecoming is likely to be a painful process, for instance, for those who have lost their homes or who have otherwise been displaced. His discussion at the WMC of his community-engaged performance *'Ghost Parade'*, incited discussions on rurality and the effect of loss of traditional ways of life and industries on communities, causing a raft of social difficulties for those communities, including poverty, migration and resulting difficulties associated with aging populations. The pain of "*returning home to find that everything had changed*", as David Harradine had put it in his reflections upon the keywords, was all too apparent for many of the group, who had first-hand experience of rural decline.

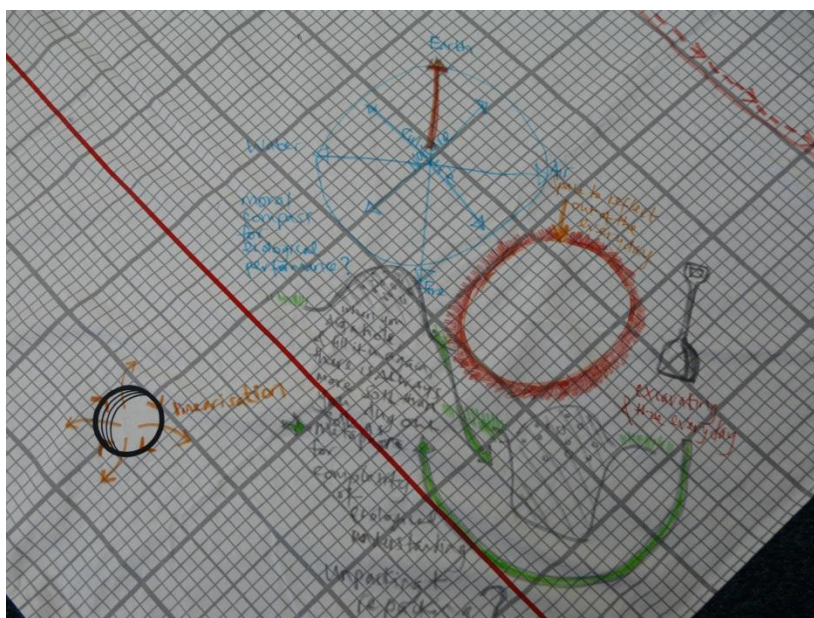


Figure 8 Digging metaphor

Our conversations unveiled that in considering pathways to a more sustainable future, place-based reflections emerged as generative of rich conversation that exposed complexity, a process likened to the excavation of memories (see figure 8), which could in turn be likened to an attempt to '*read with the grain*' (Archer *et al* 2013) to gain deep insights into the structure of

community and place, as well as tracing insights from the past that could enable future progressions towards more sustainable livelihoods. More centrally still, the illustrations in figure 8 show that such processes do not reveal a blueprint model for future progression, as a return to the past, as the *'Back to the Land'* movement may advocate through a return to agrarian living, but rather an acceptance of the complexity of ecological knowing, involves an excavation of our situation that in itself changes as it is excavated.

The concept of places as “living entities”, as one participant puts it, emerged as central to our discussions. One participant wrote on a tablecloth that this would involve taking into account the significance of the *“historical, social and cultural landscapes of Wales”* that are characterised by *“radical politics, religion and communalism”* as inevitably shaping mind-sets and discussions, building upon *“folk memories”* and *“social connections”* that hold rural areas, that may be blighted by chronic economic decline, together. Reflecting on Caddick’s work, another participant discusses the value of considering the culture of place, describing his work as not *“a gratuitous celebration of a “mythical” past”* but *“rather a way to construct a bridge, which is essential to any possible hope for a more sustainable future – a re-connection with our own place, a re-configuration of our own histories that allows to look forward in order to hope and imagine different life trajectories, more connected ways of life.”* Yet the troubling problematic of *“liminal spaces”*, as one participant put it wherein *“the conventional economy will not deliver and we have not yet invented a sustainable alternative”*. The ultimately troubling question, put forward by performance scholar Mike Pearson at the end of day 2 therefore remains - when is it right to intervene, in halting the processes of decline and as one participant put it *“the fracturing of communities”*? Implicitly, we might also then ask when might benign neglect be an appropriate or perhaps the only response possible.

#### 4.1.2 Spatial dimensions of home

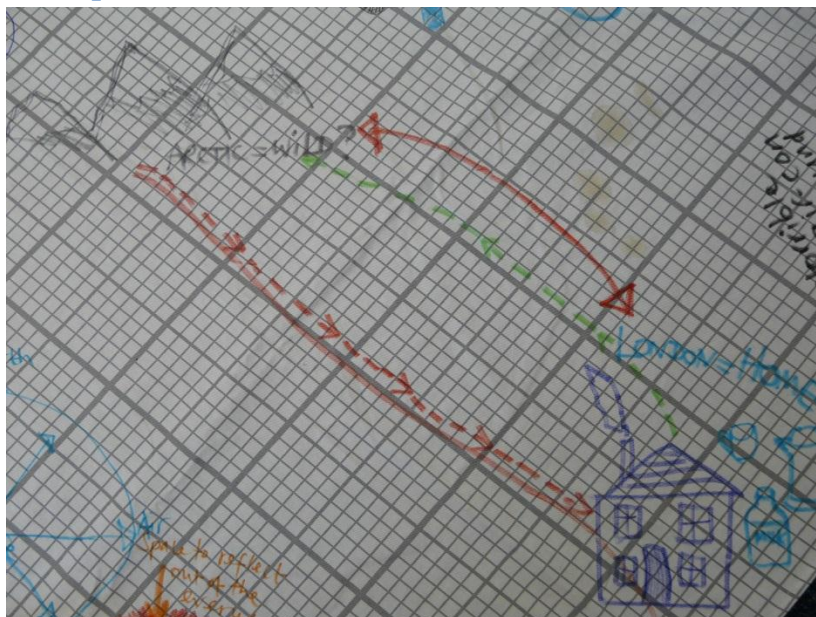


Figure 7 Film Interpretation: *It's the Skin You're Living In*

A traditional concept of home is also problematized by the recognised need for global interdependence that comes from our scientific appreciation that our actions create far reaching effects that make us aware of our broader responsibilities. Concepts of connectivity to other species and to each other within complex systems on a global scale were projected through David Harradine's film: *'It's the Skin You're Living In'*, which resonated with individuals present. The performer in the film uses his body to demonstrate this interrelationship by literally inhabiting the body of a polar bear. He displaces the bear to unfamiliar environments, where his presence is ignored by birds and cows, passing lorry drivers and static power lines. The film illustrates the contradiction that though the polar bear is highly visible in our media, the human world does not really recognise the existence of the bear. Despite its startling presence, the polar bear is as invisible in true form, as in the media and environmental campaigns that attempt to heighten awareness of his plight. In interpreting the work, many participants expressed that the film encouraged an appreciation of the reality that the survival of the polar bear, depends on our actions, while our survival was dependent on his survival due to global Climate Change. Yet as well as introducing the familiar idea of interdependence, individuals seem to have in some cases left with an uncanny sense that the film is telling us more than this.

Elaborating on the consequences of such alienation, bell hooks (2009; 26) states, 'estrangement from our natural environment is the cultural contest wherein violence against the earth is accepted and normalized' (Figure 9). Through making connections between the global and the local, David Harradine's film points us towards problematic of setting our home boundaries too narrowly, as expressed in a response from one participant, who observed *"a house is not necessarily a home if we alienate ourselves from this condition of being-in-the-(natural) world."*

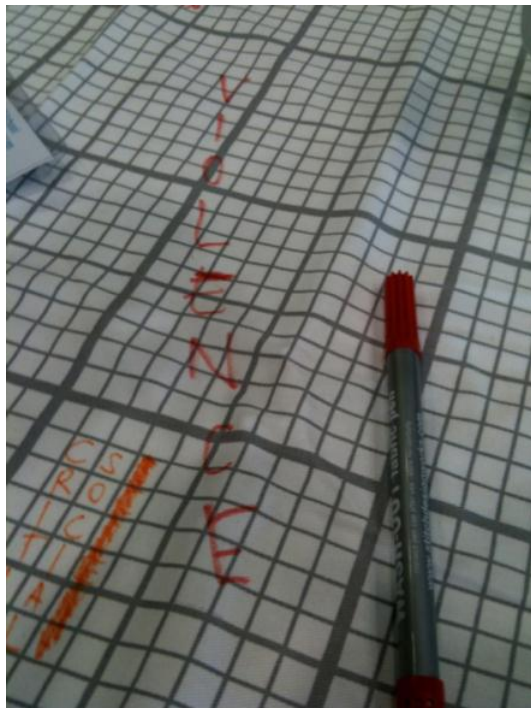


Figure 9 Violence Tablecloth WMC



The performances presented throughout our events have encouraged an appreciation of modern conceptions of *homing* as inclusive of the progressions we make within our communities with both an eye on the past, given that as one individual wrote on a table cloth “*the future arrives from behind us*” and an eye on the global and yet our potential to ignore far away realities, despite our interconnections is perhaps what is really uncanny. These themes deal with in ‘*It’s the Skin You’re Living In*’ provided a connection back to Siriol Joyner’s performance at the Aberystwyth event where the dancer drew on Gregory Bateson to express the significance of connectivity which led her not to “*seek a relationship with nature*” because she recognised that she was “*already part of it*”. For Siriol, “*poetry does not tamper with the world but moves in it*”. These reflections provide an important reflection on the nature of arts practice and attempts being made to demonstrate connectivity. In a similar way, both Siriol’s performance and David’s film generate conversations around the dances which are, as Siriol put it, resistant to “*embodied thought processes*” and are rather best engaged with on an intuitive, affective level.

## 4.2 Reflection: Risk and futures

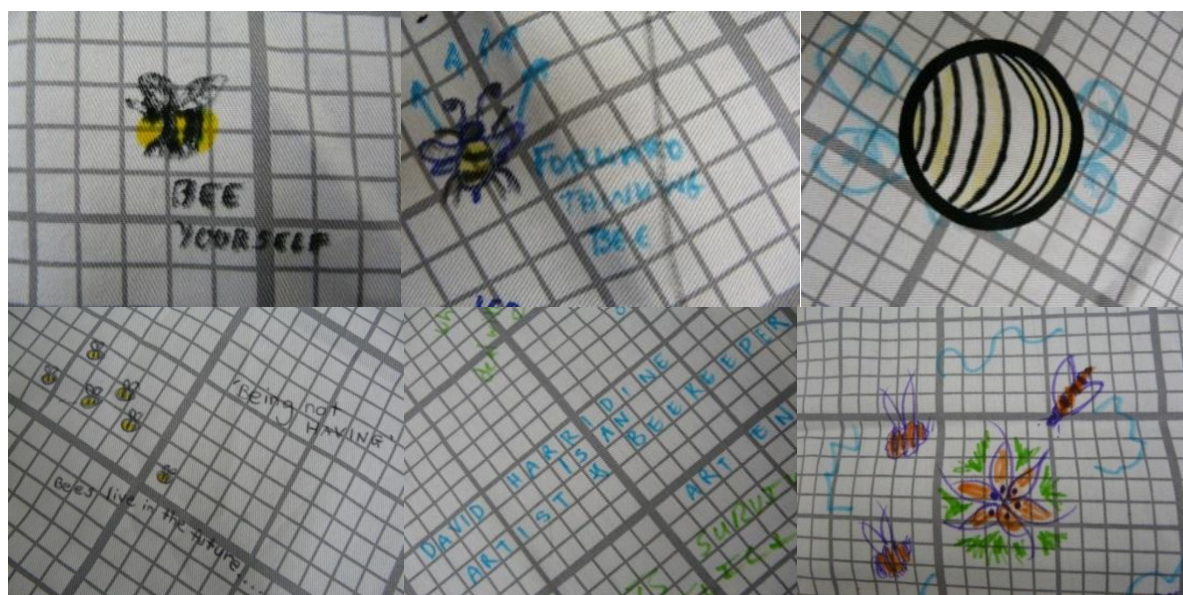


Figure 10 Enticing Bees

At the final symposium, David Harradine’s reflections on nostalgia also inspired discussions on futures. In his short piece: ‘*On Nostalgia and Why Bees are the Antithesis of Art*’. David, who is both artist and a beekeeper, reflects on why both bees and artists have “*been recruited for the cause of sustainability*”. He views bees as the antithesis of artists, as creatures who operate in a machine-like fashion to shore-up their own futures, employing the “*strict regime of the colony, codified behaviour, stasis, and repetition [which] are vital if the colony is to survive*”. By contrast, artists do not orientate themselves towards the future but rather seeks to disrupt the present, as a sort of creator of “*weather or waves*”. Thus art is an “*agent of change*”, that “*fractures and troubles*”. He described how being “*future oriented*” can affects us in the present, proposing a concept of “*future nostalgia*”, through which we anticipate our future home, taken broadly to mean our position on the planet, in a way that expects a painful homecoming,



leading to avoidance of transition, as well as inactivity in the present. In congruence with thinking about the significance of oblique artworks, David argues that art does not have a clearly defined purpose that is to shape a predictable future to ensure the survival of a colony, seeking to ward off future change and associated pain. Rather artists embrace the possibilities of change and thus shape the present and future by encouraging the emergence of alternatives. It is thus in this process of troubling and fracturing where the arts has most to offer processes of making sense of sustainability.

Many of the performances at the events troubled and fractured visions of progress, as David suggests the arts do. For example, *'Return to Battleship Island'* a film shown at the WMC, could be interpreted as almost prophetic of the future for industrialised, market-driven destinations. Indeed, some participants related the piece to their current environment by referring to the motto of the Cardiff Railway Company, inscribed on the Pier Head building in Cardiff Bay *'Wrth ddwr a than' (By Water and Fire)*. Or made connections between Hashima and our location as a place of *"aging iron like a decaying coral of jagged edges of reddened rush"* in *"permanent motion, shaped by sea, sky and wind."* Some participant's reflections on the film included words like *"sickening"*, *"frightening"* and *"deathly"*. The reach of the work in unsettling, through the creation of a collection of images, which are, as Hassall and Lavery intended, *"orphans who reject all fathers and mothers...content to drift and float"*. The impact of such images on one individual is summed up in this reflection:

*"Hell, hopelessness, horror - it seems important to go through despair, sleepwalking through decay, the mind was weeping, an image expending itself of no lasting importance"*.

Another comment left on a tablecloth was that *'Return to Battleship Island'* had *"created a void"*. Yet it might also be interesting to consider how the creation of *"voids"* as empty spaces or perhaps even abysmal spaces may be generative of hope. In his text *'Radical Hope'*, Lear (2009) describes the destruction of the culture of the Crow Native American Indian tribe as a result of their loss of ability to hunt Buffalo. Lear (2009) describes how Plenty Coup, last great chief of the Crow Nation had described how progress beyond complete cultural devastation was possible through engaging with a *'radical hope'* as a form of courage that allowed openness to the possibility of the emergence of novel ways of life and alternative means of survival. In a similar sense, Berlant (2006:266) argues that voids or hiatuses are a prominent part of our contemporary public and private lives at a historical moment where our fantasies of the *'good life'*, which included upward mobility and political and social equality, are fraying. At this moment, Berlant (2006: 4) argues we stand at an impasse. Therefore we are hyper-vigilant and gather materials that may help us to understand our predicament and maintain our stability in times of great uncertainty. At this moment she argues, in this middle space, we experience a *'brush with solidarity'* wherein:

A fantasy from the middle of disrepair doesn't add up to repair. It adds up to a confidence that proceeds without denying fragility. Within the ordinary that means having adventures and being in the impasse together, waiting for the other

shoe to drop, and also, allowing for some healing and resting, waiting for it not to drop.

This willingness to standstill, to inhabit the void, to courageously re-evaluate the future, as the people of the Crow Nation did in Lear's (2009) 'Radical Hope', may well be a space in which art can encourage us, through it's troubling and fracturing.

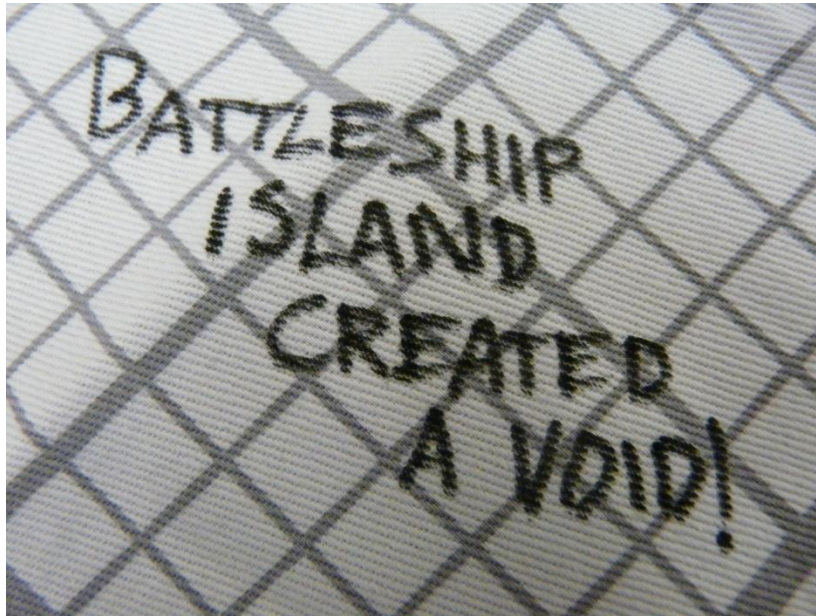


Figure 11 Interpretation of Battleship Island

Alike to the film *'Return to Battleship Island'*, other performances could be seen as being able to create voids or hiatus that were generative in their effects. For example, Rhodri Thomas' performance *'Who's Afraid?'* projected fear of a zombie apocalypse, connecting this to gnawing contemporary everyday fears that consume many people. In discussions that followed Rhodri's performance, participants shared a sense that such fears associated with environmental and economic degradation were authentically felt. Yet they also saw "*people*" as the main protagonists of future change, which would be brought about with increased understanding, "*mindfulness*" as well as "*moderation*", "*nature connections*" and "*community*".

It is also interesting to consider Gareth Clark's account at our second event, which described his performance-based, community engaged theatre in the city of Newport which revealed that his city co-inhabitants had decided to fill the void they found themselves to inhabit with distractions and inaction, allowing them to find a route for *'how best to live on, considering'* (Berlant 2006: 3). At this event also, Fern Smith described her own uncertain personal position, which had led her to stand still, wherein she has realised that the contorting effects of looking backwards with shame or forwards with fear had led her to feel that the only place to be currently is in the present where she sought to redefine her own way forward whilst not dominated by extreme emotions.

At the final event, the idea of radical hope was nurtured by John Barry, through his poetic response to the keywords, read during the first morning. In the context that Lear (2009) uses the term, John encouraged us to confront an uncertain future with courage, through attentiveness to open possibilities. In ending his reflections, he juxtaposes a series of future pathways that seem

to represent that which we are currently committed to (a future of increased knowledge, labour and death), to an alternative of “*Poetry, life affirmation, imagination and creativity at the end of the world as we know it...*” heeding us to remember that as such a new world emerges “*then the end of the world as we know it, is not the end of the world...*”

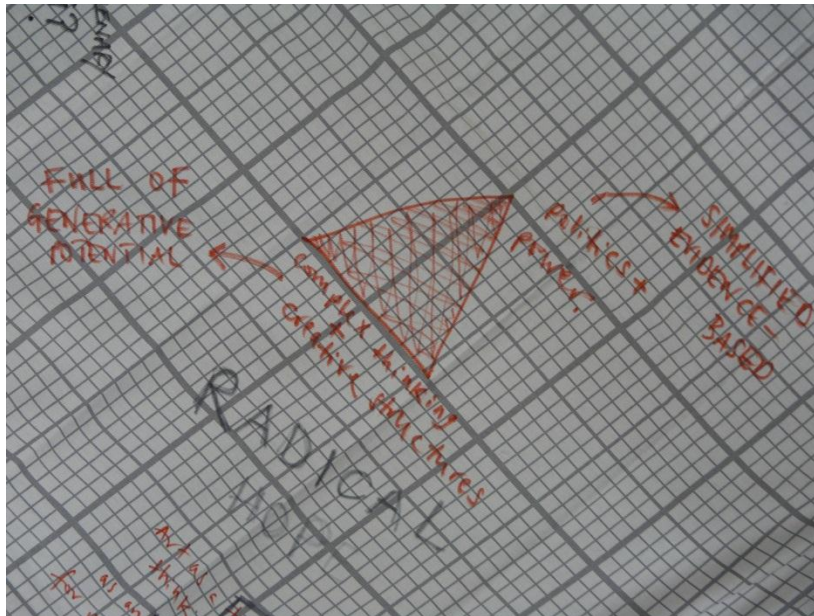


Figure 12 Radical Hope

The idea of hope resonated strongly with many individuals present at the *WMC*, as reflected on the tablecloths. This hope was not utopic or delusional but a more of an active hope, based in the present actions. Such active hope, as well as being present in the works of Lear (2009), is also commonly advocated by commentators on environmental and social crisis including Macy and Johnstone (2012) and Rebecca Solnit (2006). Prominent words written on the tablecloths included ‘*change*’, ‘*local*’, ‘*new*’, ‘*conflict*’, ‘*resilience*’, ‘*thinking*’, ‘*making*’ and ‘*going*’ – all active verbs, to which a sense of *communitas* was also seen as playing a key role, as evidenced through the presence of the terms ‘*community*’, ‘*collective action*’, ‘*common cause*’ and ‘*education*’. As at the second and third events, there seemed to be recognition amongst participants that human action was central to making hope possible, for example, several participants quoted Raymond Williams in saying: “*to be radical is to make hope possible rather than despair inevitable*”, while other referred to common proverbs including “*you make the road by walking*”.





Figure 13 Radical Hope Placard

Such conceptions, as recognised by participants, were also aligned to ideas of artist's improvisation where we use our imaginations and are open to the unexpected, the emergent and as one participant put it *"sustainability beyond logic"*. In particular the importance of *"failing"* was felt to be a significant part of building a sustainable future, as depicted in figure 14 where participant inscribes the significance of the *"freedom to fail"* as well as the *"glory of hope"*. We thus gain a sense of the use of the concept of failure in the sense that Samuel Becket used it when he said *'Fail again. Fail better'*. Moreover, conflict was thought to be an important part of this process of renewal, including by art scholars present at the final event. For example, as one individual put it there is a need to use *"crisis for creating something better"* and to *"create comfortable conflict"*.

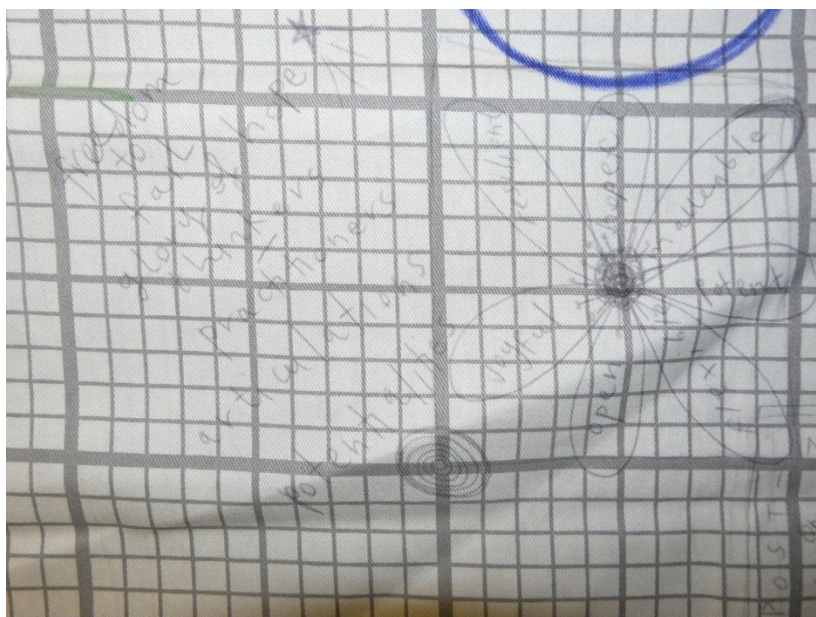


Figure 14 "Freedom to Fail"

The art world's role in creating a more sustainable future may well therefore be to disrupt stasis rather than to arrive at some end goal. This is therefore a critique of sustainability as a concept focused on goals rather than process, and recognition of the potentiality to bring an alternative future into being through courageous hope. There seemed therefore to be a recognition of the dangers of Berlant's (2006) 'cruel optimism' about a perceived stable future, as well as an appreciation of Lear's (2009) survival strategies that involve being open to possibilities, something which David Harradine and others have described as being a key way of the artist.

#### 4.3 Aesthetics, emotion and affect

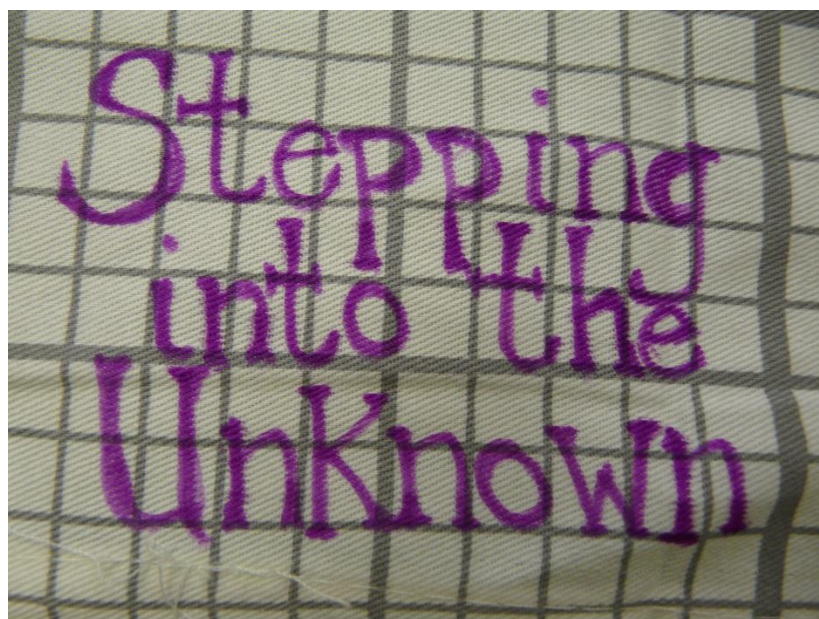


Figure 15 Stepping into the Unknown

Perhaps one of the strongest reflections that our collaboration has encouraged is focused upon how risk is perceived or framed in affective terms. Future risks are perhaps most commonly associated with negative emotional perspectives encouraging fear, despair and loss. Yet through our network interactions we have come to widely appreciate that embracing risk can also be exhilarating and capable of bringing about joy in the very act of taking it, which is perhaps as central to the creative process, as the conflict that Wallace Heim mentioned in her opening piece on day one of the *WMC* symposium. Throughout our network, those from the art world seemed to be encouraging or daring their interlocutors in the social sciences to step or even jump into the unknown in order to embrace risk, as the children in the film *'Return to Battleship Island'* had in swift repetition, as they jumped from a small cliff at the edge of the island into the ocean. In the very act of taking risk, is to embrace possibility and even opportunity, which creates joy in existence that can nurture creativity and renewal. Consequently, it is crucial to recognise that as well as the negative dimensions of risk, embracing risk can make life more fulfilling and meaningful, whatever that may mean for the individual living that life. Embracing risk is thus not only about despairing for the future, or projecting what opportunities may lay ahead but about focusing on the unknown dimensions of our existence as generative of awe and wonder as the stuff of life itself.



Uncertainty, standing on the edge of an abyss, a ridge, a plain, a threshold may therefore bring emotions of joy, elation, adrenaline and awe, as well as feelings of fear, despair, guilt and shame touched upon in some of our performances. In seeking to bring something else into being, it is possible to find courage to live anew, as the Crow people did in Lear's (2006) reflections. At the impasse (Berlant 2006) at which we now stand, individuals look around themselves for new beginnings with a radical hope that they have the capacity to venture, through courageous collective experimentation. Embracing all eventualities, including the possibility of failure was determined to be crucial to this process, as artist Ben Stammers advocated was necessary in processes of composition, which for him involved not focusing explicitly upon failure but *"protecting the sheer delight of things"* and *"allowing yourself to be drawn to word or sound or image, without knowing really why - following desire, however obscure in that sense, and about needing to 'protect' that early stage from the business of analysis or intention"*.

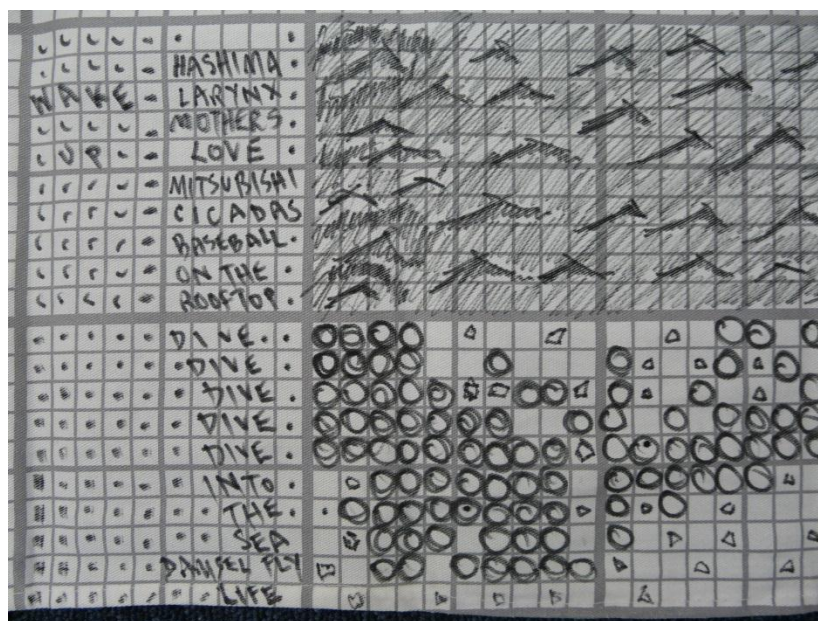


Figure 16 Interpretation of Return to Battleship Island

From our tablecloths emerged a call for collaborators to lose their past coordinates, viewed in some cases as trappings. There were expressions that included dismay with the dominance of academic knowledge construction as a way of knowing the world, and with *"broken universities"*, which demanded the construction of new systems of learning. To this end, one individual quoted Rumi, the Sufi mystic: *"Sell your knowledge and buy bewilderment"*, followed with the statement *"I can't imagine because I am"*. Moreover, one individual juxtaposed instrumentality to the emergent concept of radical hope (figure 17), suggesting an alternative progress for interactions between the discipline. Whilst in figure 18 a participant elaborates upon this theme through the suggestion that *"post-normal social sciences"* could converge with a *"radical hope"* through being *"open, flexible, flourishing, nurturing, and adaptive"*. In this sense, through visual depiction, the individual associates such hopefulness with the passing waves (*"a wave can pass"*), a metaphor present in the works *'Return to Battleship Island'*, *'The Tumbleweed'* and in the sentiments of David Harradine's reflections on artists and bees.

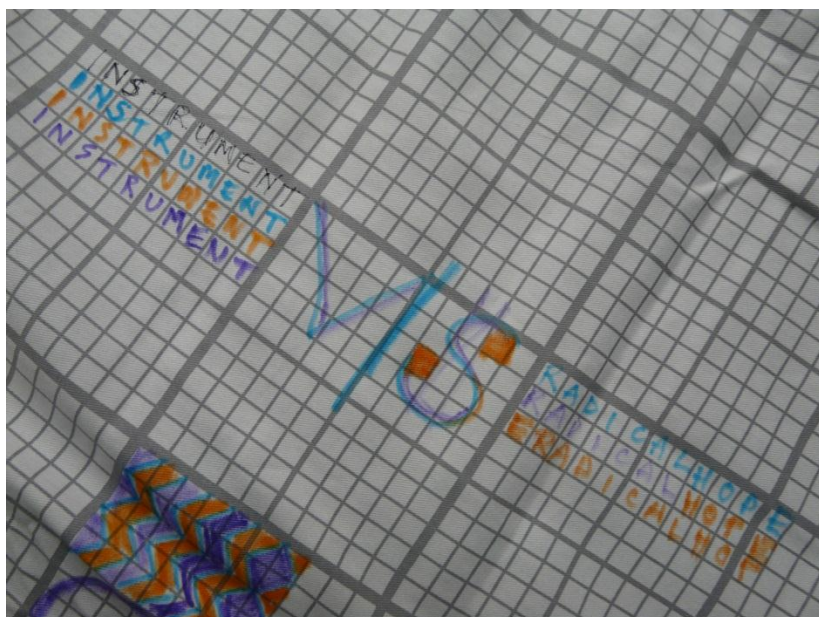


Figure 17 Instrument vs. Radical Hope

Moreover, through tablecloth jottings, individual emphasised that art is an embodied practice, demanding “*improvisation*”, “*walking*”, and “*sensory experiences*” including, in some cases, outdoor environments, feeling textures and being involved in making processes and experimentation. It is also evident from these tablecloth reflections that this dimension of our collaborations could have been more present, for though we witnessed performances, some of which were more sensory, for example, *The Tumbleweed*, there was an expressed yearning for, as one participant put it, “*Chalk and Slate, and seaweed, salt and space and smoothness*” and a desire for us to walk and make together in our future interactions. Through the network we have thus gained a deeper appreciation of the fact that making sense of sustainability can be effectively approached through experimental and oblique art, as approaches that Wallace Heim (2003) as well as several art scholars present at our event have urged us to, as means that allow for the emergence of the unexpected from such practices.



Figure 18 Post-normal social science and radical hope



## 5.0 Concluding Thoughts and Future Directions

This twelve-month collaborative project that sought to make sense of sustainability has seen the growth of a network of participants that brings together our existing contacts at many universities and artistic organisations across the United Kingdom. This network now includes considered leaders in the field of environmental science, sustainability sciences, performance scholarship and the environmental arts and humanities. A tangible result of the network has been the development of an online network to which 130 individuals from 86 different organisations have subscribed. These individuals have been regularly updated on the *EFD* network activities and events through our network list newsletters and blog. This process has facilitated attendance at four major events, each of which progressively built upon the previous to develop the themes of our enquiry, structured around our keywords which have encouraged an interdisciplinary engagement with central concepts in the consideration of the sustainability. In setting out to explore our shared academic interests, employing a transdisciplinary approach, we endeavoured to gain a rich understand of the workings of each other's fields. We pursued approaches to research and representation that facilitated a collaborative method. Consequently, we drew from concepts of performance ethnography (Hamera 2011), narrative enquiry (Denzin 1997), ecological literature (Archer *et al* 2013) and performance ecology (Heim 2003). Such thinking influenced our methods of engagement at the events, our processes of gathering reflections on the emerging discussions and our ways of making sense of the outcomes of these discussions. In doing so, we have gained novel understandings of how a more sustainable society may be brought into being through cultural transition.

Our network events engaged with artists providing a platform for the display of their works dealing with ecological and social issues, encouraging inexplicitly discussions on the selected keywords with wider audiences of fellow artists, art scholars, social scientists and wider publics. Our activities were underpinned with an appreciation of the importance of oblique artworks and creative processes that reflected sustainability themes at a deep, complex level. It was felt that such an approach was necessary in order to avoid instrumentalising artists by "*recruiting them to the cause of sustainability*", as David Harradine put it. Naturally therefore, our collaborations resisted imposing a traditional evaluation of audience perceptions of these performances that may have sought to definitively determine the responsiveness of audiences to such works. Instead, through combining artistic and interpretive social scientific methods we sought to encourage instant audience-artist interaction following the performances. Through world café style conversations audiences, artists and scholars were able to openly discuss the pieces. This was an unusual experience for artists and in the case of Rhodri Thomas, this informed a re-writing of the end of his performance, which in some way emphasises the value of this style of discussion for creating an effect in the wider world. The method has also been used independently by others within the network. For example, Gareth Clark (*Mr and Mrs Clark Theatre*) used the technique to help to establish next steps in the development of their community engaged work in Newport, through the '*Newport International Airspace*' project, following their initial event. The *world café* style discussion was also generative of rich insights into the types of responses that the performances created, which allowed us to reflect on our keywords whilst not privileging the researcher's voice over our participants.

## 5.1 Key Insights

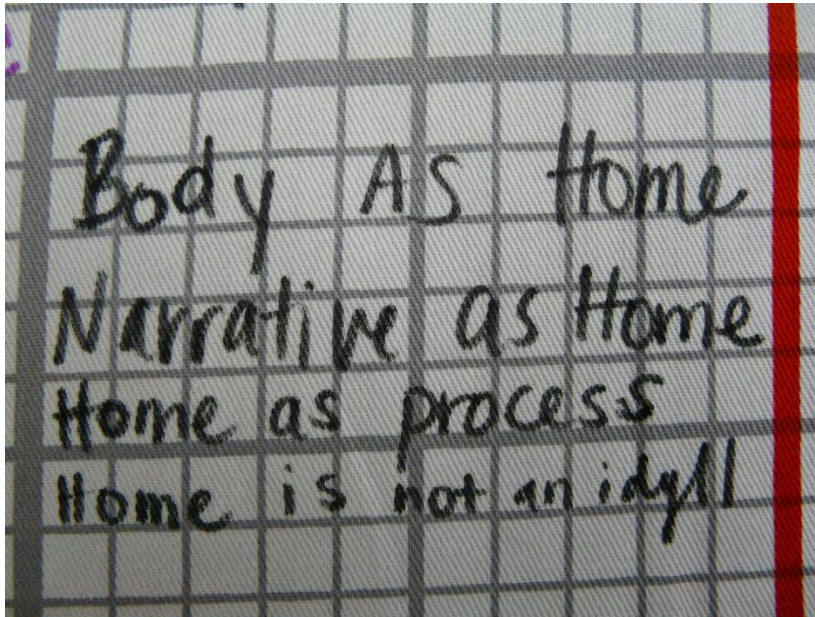


Figure 19 Dimensions of Homing

The works of artists including Siriol Joyner, Simon Whitehead, David Harradine and Gareth Clark informed discussions concerning the different spatial and temporal scales upon which it is possible to reflect upon the concept of home. Connectivity between the past and the present, as well as the global and the local emerge as broader underlying themes central to a progression to a more sustainable society, while a more parochial, sedentary consideration of a bounded home was regarded more sceptically.

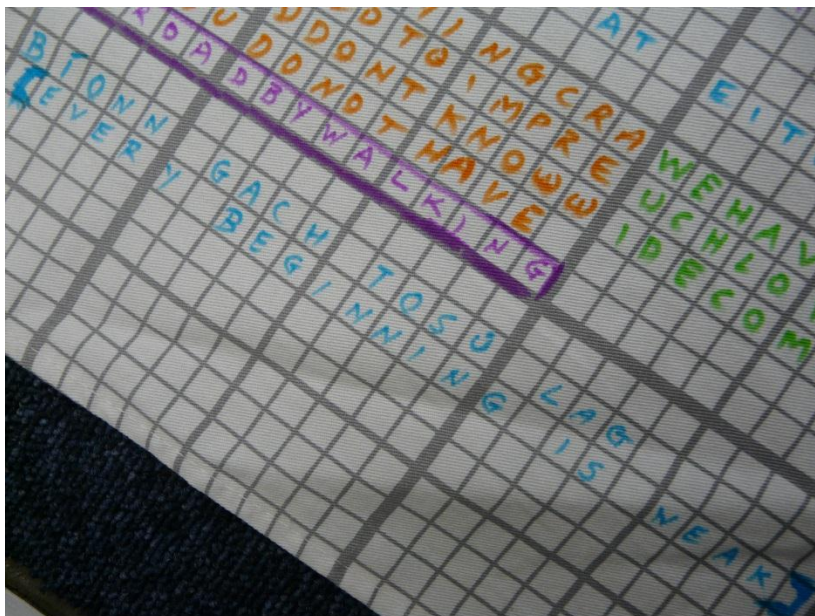


Figure 20 "Every beginning is Weak"

In reflecting on bringing an alternative future into being and the role of risk within this, the artists role in "*troubling and fracturing*" rather than as "*machines of the future*" emerged strongly as a reflection on what was needed to create a more sustainable future. The focus therefore was less upon providing a route map, but on the generative conditions for courage to

emerge in order to go forth. This is seen to be best nurtured by a sense of radical hope, as put forward at our final event by John Barry. With a sense of radical hope, people are the main protagonists in bringing an alternative present into being. Thinking about futures and risk in this sense allows us to appreciate how hiatus in activity can be crucial in establishing new courses of action, as is being willing to fail. Such insights are crucial in understanding how it might be possible to engage with an uncertain future positively.



Figure 21 “You make the Road by Walking”

Finally, emotions and affective dimensions of experience play a strong part in processes of thinking about futures. Through our network activities, we have considered risk as capable of generating both positive and negative emotions. The artist’s way in particular encourages us to engage in collective experimentation, that courageously embraces all eventualities.

## 5.2 Next Steps for the network

At the close of our final event participants offered their thoughts on what they felt should be the next steps in this arts-social science collaboration. A theme that emerged strongly was that future collaboration could include practical projects, while there should be more engagement with wider communities, using co-creation strategies and participatory action research methodologies. Wallace Heim suggested that collaboration between the arts and social sciences should be at the level of methodologies, an idea which resonated with many individuals present. Tim O’Riordan suggested that the arts and social sciences might collaborate to help to generate intergenerational conversations, which he perceived as crucial to the development of a more sustainable future. Specific opportunities for engaging with public sector initiatives were upheld, including for example the *National Conversation*, which is being held in Wales over the course of 2014, as well as collaborations through the *NTW Assemblies* which stimulate debates on issues considered important by the population. There were also calls for social scientists to have on more of a curatorial role in working with artists to help share works more widely.



## 6.0 References

- Adkins, L., & Lury, C. (2009). Introduction What Is the Empirical?. *European Journal of Social Theory*, 12(1), 5-20.
- Archer, J. Turley, R., and Thomas, H. (2013) Reading with the Grain: Sustainability and the Literary Imagination, *2013 Inspire Lecture on Literature and Sustainability*, University of Wales.
- Badiou, A. (2001). *Ethics: An essay on the understanding of evil*. Verso.
- Belfiore, E., & Bennett, O. (2007). Rethinking the social impacts of the arts. *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 13(2), 135-151.
- Berlant, L. G. (2011). *Cruel optimism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Denzin, N. K. (1997). Reading narrative. In *Interpretive ethnography: Ethnographic practices for the 21st century*. (pp. 231-250). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Drexler K E (1986) *Engines of Creation: the Coming Era of Nanotechnology*, New York: Anchor-Doubleday, Available from: [http://e-drexler.com/d/06/00/EOC/EOC\\_Table\\_of\\_Contents.html](http://e-drexler.com/d/06/00/EOC/EOC_Table_of_Contents.html), Accessed: 31/01/2012
- Emmott, S. (2013). *Ten billion*. Random House LLC.
- Geertz (1973) *The Interpretation of Cultures*, New York, Basic Books.
- Hamera, Judith. (2011) "Performance ethnography." *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research*, Sage: 317-330.
- Heim, W. (2003). *Slow activism: homelands, love and the lightbulb*. *The Sociological Review*, 51(s2), 183-202.
- Hooks, B. (2008). *Belonging: A culture of place*. Routledge.
- Jelinek, A. (2013). *This is Not Art: Activism and Other'not-art'*. IB Tauris Publishers.
- Macy, J., & Johnstone, C. (2012). *Active hope: How to face the mess we're in without going crazy*. New World Library.
- Massey, D. (2005). *For space*. Sage.
- Lafrenière, D., & Cox, S. M. (2013). 'If you can call it a poem': toward a framework for the assessment of arts-based works. *Qualitative Research*, 13(3), 318-336.

Lather, P. (2013). Methodology-21: what do we do in the afterward?. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 26(6), 634-645.

Lear, J. (2009). *Radical hope: Ethics in the face of cultural devastation*. Harvard University Press.

Pearson, M. (2013). *Marking Time: Performance, Archaeology and the City*. University of Exeter Press.

Solnit, R. (2010). *Hope in the dark*. Canongate Books.

Turner, V. (1982) *From Ritual to Theatre*, New York, PAJ

Weintraub, L. (2012) *To Life! Eco Art in Pursuit of a Sustainable Planet*, University of California Press, Berkeley.

## 7.0 Appendices

### A. Promotional Leaflet

The network is supported by the following research groups/institutes, policymakers, NGOs and members of the arts community

Cardiff University  
• Understanding Risk Group  
• Sustainable Places Research Institute  
Aberystwyth University  
Cardiff Philosophy Café  
Cardiff Transition  
Centre for Alternative Technology  
Cynnal Cymru-Sustain Wales  
Dyfi Biosphere Arts Network  
Emergence  
Glenn Davidson  
Mr and Mrs Clark  
National Theatre Wales  
Simon Whitehead  
Volcano Theatre  
Welsh Government

#### Register Your Interest

If you wish to register your interest in becoming a network member, please send an email with this request to:  
[DunkleyRA@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:DunkleyRA@cardiff.ac.uk)

Visit our website for more information  
[www.cardiff.ac.uk/socsci/environmental-futures](http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/socsci/environmental-futures)

#### Network Organisers

• Karen Henwood  
(Cardiff University, School of Social Sciences)  
• Carl Lavery  
(Aberystwyth University, Theatre and Performance Studies)  
• Ria Dunkley  
(Cardiff University Sustainable Places Research Institute)  
• Chris Groves  
(Organiser Cardiff Philosophy Café and Research Associate, Cardiff University)

#### Funder

The AHRC has funded this network:  
grant number AH/K004018/1



environmental  
futures  
dialogue  
*making sense of sustainability*



#### Network aims

Cardiff University and Aberystwyth University are working collaboratively to build a social science-arts network within and beyond Wales that will:

- Enable social scientists, arts scholars and artists to work together to foster intellectually and culturally creative work - also involving people and communities - on ways of making sense of the uncertainties, ambiguities, dangers and future risks posed by natural resource depletion, climate change and environmental transformation.
- Explore how and why arts scholars, and artists who are producing and performing works on the theme of sustainability, promote awareness of the importance of the aesthetic value of those artworks.
- Develop cross-disciplinary ways of working so that artists, arts scholars and social scientists can envisage and promote generative, future-oriented actions and activities that are capable of contributing to more sustainable practice and place-making.
- Elucidate contested meanings of sustainability (including sustainable energy), and consider how 'sustainability' operates as a set of scientific, political, ethical and arts discourses.

#### Our Inquiries

There are two main substantive foci for our work - sensing and sense-making about risk, home and place, and diversity in sustainability discourse.

Experiences of 'being at home' will be a key theme, as such experiences are foregrounded within some contemporary performance arts scholarship. Here movement towards sustainability is seen as grounded in a form of ecological awareness made possible by our experiences of being at home.

This research suggests that transformations in ecological knowing are encouraged by imaginative attentiveness to the place where one lives, particularly the everyday surroundings that are most tangible to people.

Interpretive social sciences make available approaches and methods for extended study of what home and locality means to people when studied close up. These allow researchers to acknowledge the challenges associated with taking into account the kinds of affective, semiotic and social flows that characteristically occur across and around occasions of practical, everyday sense making.

Such work involves asking questions about processes of homing and place-making in a way that introduces spatial and temporal complexity. These forms of complexity tend to be obscured in our social routines and daily practices while creating, fragmenting and mobilising forms of environmental subjectivity.

#### Planned Outcomes

With these intellectual routes into our subject, and through the collaborative activities of the network (initially over the course of one year), we will be opening out ways of thinking about processes of sensing and sense-making in relation to environmental risk. In addition we will build understanding of the principles and practices of sustainability and sustainable place making.

#### Scheduled Activities

During February 2013 - January 2014 a set of academic development and public engagement activities will take place designed to promote dialogue on the theme of environmental futures.

The public activities will feature two local cafes at which environmental thinkers and performance artists will share their work with one another and the public.

- 14 June: Aberystwyth
- 16 July: Cardiff
- 6-7 December: World Café event, Wales Millennium Centre, Cardiff

You can find more information at:  
[www.cardiff.ac.uk/socsci/environmental-futures](http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/socsci/environmental-futures)

[www.cardiff.ac.uk/socsci/environmental-futures](http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/socsci/environmental-futures)

## B. Aberystwyth Arts Centre Tablecloth jottings summary: 14th June 2013

### Pink post-it's:

1. Language Faith
2. **Accountability**, feelings/hopes. ??/ spiritual value  
**Influence and reflect:** Sustainability? Sustained whether we like it or not.
3. How can you tell if something is 'sustainable'? How is art to do with 'sustainability' different from any other art?
4. Making evolution and adaptation a conscious process.  
Encouraging creativity as a way to get back in touch with ourselves, to re-home.
5. Art can be a mindful practice: My art must use sustainable inputs/materials sustainability  
And, I must encourage others to practice art.
6. I'd like us to have fun, talk and listen well and (maybe) commit to something useful?
7. Disconnected from life.
8. Our homes and belonging to specific places and people are exciting when provides the diversity we need for cosmopolitan lives.
9. If beauty is in the eye of the beholder, surely live sustainability is in no way in conflict with aesthetics?
10. I don't have a particular outcome in mind. We could spend a lifetime trying to define just one of the three terms, that to come to a resolution will be impossible. We are all coming from different places.

### Green post-it's:

1. Problems of documentation of new works
2. New aesthetics of work of practice.
3. Dialogic v/s the old way.
4. Home as a resource.
5. Encountering and reflecting.
6. For something to be sustainable it must always change. What is an aesthetic of change?
7. What kinds of aesthetic are encouraging – or entrenching?
8. How and why is the idea/practice of 'homing' linked to the other 2 words?
9. The significance of empathy – 1<sup>st</sup> person science- subjective ways of knowing and learning.
10. When did the term 'sustainability' come into your usage?
11. Is home tangible?
12. What do we gain from investigating in an ecology of time? (If not just getting tips for the future)
13. Sustainability as instinct?  
Survival as an in-road to affect.
14. Queer homing and sustainability/ the problem with heterosexual utopias.
15. Opening up perception.
16. Disappearance.
17. Can we create/ do we want to create an ethics through art practice?



## 2<sup>nd</sup> Pink post-its:

1. Stuart, Graham, Barbara, Jane, Rosie
2. Aesthetics and sustainability – what does it mean?
  - Difficult relationship
  - If so why?
  - What we'd like a group to do?
  - Homing vs. cosmopolitan?
3. Power with
  - Not power over.
4. Define “sustainable”?
  1. One definition includes high levels of economic growth.
  2. Define “aesthetics”?
  3. Homing? Does this relate to ecology? (from the Greeks)

### Definitions

Aaargh...

## Yellow post-its:

1. 1. Is there a distinction between engineered and artistic interfaces of humans and everything else?
2. Is a coherent definition of sustainability possible?
2. Contrast between sustainability and development – economic growth is often viewed as development, but is it sustainable?
  - Can being sustainable mean restriction?
  - \*Aesthetics \*Sustainability \*homing.

## C. Collection of Blog posts from Cardiff Creativity Café – 1: 16<sup>th</sup> July World Café

Table cloth 1:

- Fear – Shame (diagram in a continuous cycle);
- Work situation
- Pencil
- Joanna Macey's Spiral of Change – diagram (Gratitude, pain, seeing with new eyes, action).

Table Cloth 2:

- Kristina
- Are in such a place
- Burden?
- Positive news
- Incredible edible
- Inner peace
- Land;
- Weak – empowered to take action – social media (connects to next statement)
- Rise about the media and those who are paid to control our emotions, take back our thoughts;
- Competition is a way of dealing with uncertainty;
- Fear of an imagined future, rather than an uncertain one;
- Evidence?
- Uncertainty is = that space: Pre-dominant/ always existing;
- Uncertainty = space/ stillness/ peace – we never know, we can't. Emotions home into it after? Uncertainty doesn't connect to emotion?
- Acknowledging existence of negative/positive emotions- they exist in us all but the acceptance helps to ignore or power through them – Maybe we're uncertain that we're alone or not and so we spiral inwards. Go outward (talk) leads to acceptance – peaceful mood?

Table Cloth 3:

- Any sense of certainty about the future is specious/ false. Environment – frustrated, despairing.
- Uncertain aspects: climate/ food security; resources – feel quite ?, trust;
- Vision creates future- uncertain because it's the prelude to break thoughts; all massive changes are quite sudden- critical mass. Chaos theming – it's a small stream has triggering this change.
- (With picture): Stories colour sense capable of what we can do. Need to have these stories. Sensing community – pockets – not broader sense, bigger, smaller, inaction of common cause. Excitement, trepidation. Hope – hang on for things to change. Dystopia future- takes away motivation, stay spiralling decline. Individualisation recent decades, collective action, importance education to prep be flexible/ sustainability/ compare and

make an opinion competition, positive steps, internet connects but outcome? Security out comes. Common cause.

#### Table Cloth 4:

- Volcano – the planet is endangered by our exploitation of it, and we may be too late to save it;
- The medical treatment system has not been well-built in China, especially the farmers and the workers have not been involved in elite system;
- Rise of individualisation – the narrative we see ourselves as being part of – things getting better. Education for Feasibility (?) and sustainability – rather than only serving the state and the workplace. Paul Allen – how we made a success of things.
- Guilty at having lived most of my life in a time of relative plenty and apparent certainty!!

#### Table Cloth 5:

- Personal – what next? – family
- Larger picture – whose responsibility – when will the inevitable happen. Uncertainty not always bad. Trust = control.
- Uncertainty – insecurity
- Courage
- A list: Uncertainty – honesty, options, power (to control?), courage, not insecure. Insecurity= expediency, fear (of freedom); not uncertain.
- Use of resources
- Angry
- 1: Resources – expediency, angry, everything okay, me peace – sad. 2: happiness; 3: how can we do anything else? 4: uncertainty and trust – tenuous, paternalism, ideally: more equal?
- Uncertainty – driving force, inhibiting, apathy, and frustration group – wider world (individual). Uncertainty –trust. What aspects of the future are uncertain – how do they make you feel? (global warming) – energy crisis, food security, extinctions, balance of power – political – all link to wars -
- Personal general
- How do they make you feel? – want to regain, seize.
- Uncertainty v trust – motivation of our leaders, food – source for food and drink, basic health issues, resolved in Victorian times being discarded, back to law of the single, no feeling of belonging, distancing, loss of community and collective rehabilitee? Encouraged. Personal impotence in affecting change, destruction of what have been won in the past.
- How can we imagine a better future when present is bleak? Surely that is why we imagine better future – survival – some control – individual and group action, sending people to Beans on Toast (back of table cloth).

Table cloth 6:

- Q1: the future arriving too quickly – unsure, childlike, in an unpleasant place, is change possible, necessary – or not? Is routine, keeping going a better place to be? The future as an unstoppable train.
- The small scale as in nature, when becoming an inter-connected collective, produces change, see Paul Hawken's "Blessed unrest". How do we give consideration for the apathetic, the disinterested? Have we become irretrievably isolated (from one another, from nature)? Will (enough) people care? Might people contextualise themselves to promote their awareness of being connected? What effect might an awareness of connection have on people's behaviour? Has the corporation become 'too big to be fair'?
- Good idea – good stores – culture of the individual, collection of singularity of ideas within a collective. Education: how do we educate? What is education? Potential but no security, paradox, social awareness- disruption- consciousness, engagement, action – active knowing vs. inaction, active not knowing; technology –channels attention away from our environment – disconnects people from places; independence isolation – globalisation, competition, why don't people take action? London riots – Egypt – internet action; common cause- individualisation; caring – emotions of caring looking after – prune, nurture growth; maintain feed footer; uncertain embracing the unknown – art is uncertain; the law, carpet ties, right and wrong ?? talk – communicative – good practice –campaigns – how change happens – new experiences – connections – art gives a vocabulary, abstract that about right and wrong – transition town, incredible edible; reporters – agents for change – positive force for change = creative tangible emotion! [Wkbrigh@cardiffmet.ac.uk](mailto:Wkbrigh@cardiffmet.ac.uk) – please could I have the cloth – Ria knows me.
- Eco-crimes – shame; already happened, too late; Paul Hawken; harming environment – animals – businesses – who makes the rules – design communication facts – emotion. Unknown rules – established what is a crime? Punishment after the event – insurance, ignorance.
- Positive news – individualism over collective thinking, communication, degradation – disempowered by surroundings/ community; progressive story – no longer have anything to contribute /motivation. Paul Hawken; technology, impatient, sceptical, resources/ materials, human interaction – social complexities, media propaganda; overwhelmed with information (true/false), withdrawn.
- ignorance

Table cloth 7:

- politicians meddling
- the unknown is –uncertainty is seductive, elusive, intoxicative.

Table cloth 8:

- job insecurity – scared – tired becoming diminished; hope; closed minded project the known; uncertainty; vision; fears vs. hope; breakdown of communities; rise of service industry; is anything permanent; ? Scale; bigger picture; micro scale – day to day living; identity – shared icons – branded identities; does bleak? hope / optimism;

- Worried, scared, tired, money –lack of, uncertainty of where you’ll be, insecurity, disillusionment, hope anger.
- Hope
- Example – job insecurity, breakdown of the community, community is this the paramount in Valleys. Merthyr had a demonstration recently, empathy! Lack of helping oneself, taking control of our life i.e. health, government, Tory all more for self-help. In valleys some school have been taken out of local authority – self-respect!

**Table Cloth 9:**

- Zombies: Uncertainty stops uncertainty! Is there a difference between uncertainty and precariousness? Panic and uncertainty. Stepping away – synchronicity, a sense of fidelity – a singularity- process – could hope be a problem? Immediacy. ? Education, a life.
- Future is present.



## D. Cardiff Creativity Café – 2 Tablecloth jottings summary– 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2013

### Table Cloth 1

- The event like a fever breaking, Natural? Restored by, The eco-system with lower population, Giving opportunity for conscious or Constituent?
- What?
- How?
- Who?
- A slower pace of life that leaves time for people to get to know many other people- a strong sense of community – which provides people with a network of support and sense of security; a transference of practical skills- in growing, building, repairing timings, an empowerment of the vulnerable – by connecting with others and self-acceptance.

### Circle with the words:

- Power
- Security
- Trad
- Benev?
- Inter
- Self-direction
- Stimulation
- ?
- How – what is global warming? Actual? Fever? Respect of others, of our environments. Tolerance of other people's ideas and thoughts, An awareness of control, An awareness of constructed structures, The ability to see change as a possibility – nature –crisis collective.
- Who? Humans us! We can't change.
- What? Imagination, Nature, Harmony/collaboration, responsibility.
- What is the world? Online? Geographical?
- Rosie, Time being focus rather than money – what is this? Is this after capitalism? Not dependent on corporation, what can change the way we have crisis?

### Table Cloth 2:

- Spuff! Ice-cream, green.
- People are lost –needs addressing, dealing with things – there and then.
- Set up to fail, moderation, the beauty of being alive, people, engage with each other, turn off, switch on, perception change, put our good energy together, honesty, who's afraid?!? Acknowledging fear...madam fear- the action of our minds, islands – Aldous Huxley – Interruptions, back passing.
- Malawi – no civil war, uangh (?) –connections with land, family conflicts, and individuals are protagonists, here!!! Peaceful – non-violent – secure, able to debate, accept,

forgive/reconcile connected, positive, secular, people – but non-politicians, non-corporate – we are the protagonists – is this possible? NGR dependence on words, detached from emotion – silence/ contemplation stillness! \* “Get up!” Mindfulness – being with yourself now! Relieve stress – pastoral special(?) education. The future: what do you want it to be like, protagonist – who will it be? Conflict arises – when needs are not met!! Hunger and fear – who’s afraid? Wolf – no fun in hunting flat back? Island – Huxley too much choice? Point – at this – note! “Suffrage”. We will have the technology, -science, we’re fucked – nature – back passing. RESP.ECT. (.) 27 Nov, failure, the ability to laugh, moderation.

- Manifestos and futures.
- People understand life. What does it mean to be human? 4 seasons. Moderation, gas, moderation. Community happiness, neighbourhood security, family, open communication, growth. Tight.
- Brisman (?) for ice-cream.

#### Table Cloth 3

- Nanotechnology – fake clean micro-machines, protagonists, Bill Eccles (?) would they 2 much power, drives optimist drivers.
- Back to basics less choice – less package, future no private cars? My generation selfish no fear in my life, 37 years, we have had a good life – future- harmony – 1<sup>st</sup> world fewer leaders – worse while population. People have to vote – too many people just stay at home. More jobs. At the age of 8 the future is 6 months.
- Fewer people, less stuff, more with nature, no cars!
- Obstacles – apathy, make things simple, open our minds, too much choice, more homes affordable.
- World I want – disease and hunger free.

#### Table Cloth 4

- An illegal war, Party politics, How are we going to start, Telly coach the stars (?), which do change the future -? Save the future, FEAR false evidence, Content and isolation, Fear, Participation tyranny of this, How we live shuts down instinct – positive, Shoulds’ and should nots’, Conciliation, social skills spiritual understanding, Reduce the control of computers – the computer age and all that goes with it, however don’t throw the baby out with the bathwater. Art and science need to know how they can connect and support and make the future. = protagonist is nature. Seeds –When I was 8.
- Mindfulness – the future- if you live mindful now, you will create the future, a replacement for religion? A source of spirituality we need to fill the gap cannot fill with technology, consumption, socialism, capitalism. Key protagonists – visionaries and visions that can mobilise populations. Ideas: cheap is not best; life matters; making moral quandaries important but not imposing, destruction hurts, things, people, art matters = not brands, reputation, superstar status. Sustainable low carbon – seen to be/ futures will be realisable, liveable for people – not a source of destruction to people’s life narratives. Environmental destruction will be in abeyance; we will live within our means. I.e. non-exploiting relationship with other and nature.

- Innocent/hopeful futures. Integrated and compassionate. Creative innovative, slow, mindful, economy – long-term wellbeing of the home, practical action, a way of living from now, beyond protagonist – universality.
- Communication and social skills; principles: equality, fairness, to be! Long-term; like it looked when I was 8! Better than the past = protagonists – everyone ‘us’ – ‘together makes a new set up’ – how it will happen? Understanding (real) of what stops people from changing/acting. Understanding of agency. Movement action – in the present. Are we really afraid? ‘A little bit of that in me’ – but is there the same fear in everyone? Binaries!
- Future is fiction – focus on stories; “we see on you tube? ‘Things happening’”. Fuel poverty, food poverty. I worry about the term future – is it avoiding the present? Mindfulness is present? Interruptions? Disrupting patterns, life in present – stop fear of death, reduction of tech? Slower time, live slower. Art without branding? Protagonists: give anything/everything a chance; people, animals, plants, communities, reclamation, disruption, disrupt the pattern, could you have principle? Mindfulness? A path- decisions and principles to live by. Uncertain futures – breakdown of community, lack of money, the future for Wales – creativity...cut restrictions, anything given a chance, can technology not be creative? Confused between creativity and creative solutions? These can be tech driven; technology doesn’t have to be resource dependent?! We’re fucked. 1. The future to look like – fairness, equality, understanding; 2. Protagonists – unclear, communities, each other – collective; 3. How will they make this- begin to understand contribute. Based on fiction – initial pres said looking to the future was based on fiction...is this a negative??

## E. Reflections from a Frustrated Poet – John Barry

If we view/construct the world with these concepts,  
what sort of world are we inhabiting?

What concepts are we playing around with or thinking and feeling through and beyond?

Anthropocentric arrogance? Respectful detachment? Fearful appropriation?

Celebratory breakdown? Transitioning and transformation ?

Being not having? Being not doing?

Lightening candles rather than cursing the dark?

Digging where we stand?

Home, homesteading

But also the trauma and complications of history, power, pain, oppression etc.

Of the construction and reconstruction/founding and refounding,  
of 'home'

a decolonisation imperative in the case of my home,  
my place.

Describing the world in particular ways  
is prescribing and bringing that world into being  
or preventing another world  
from coming into sharper focus.

A slower, more local, sharing world,  
beyond conventional economic growth  
from 'buildings, banks and boutiques'  
to 'libraries, Laundromats and light rail'.

Beyond/different to the myth/imperative of undifferentiated economic growth  
as a permanent feature of the economy

A more civic/political world  
'green republicanism'  
and stress on the common good  
and the commonwealth,

a green/ sustainable republic,  
a republic which includes the more than human?

A less opaque world  
reconnecting production and consumption ethically and ecologically...

A re-politicised, re-ethicised common world  
without politicising and ethicising all life  
a post but not anti-liberal world

Is this possible to also be a 'post-metaphysical' world?

The art of living in a world of limits.

---

What sort of subjects live in it?

Human and other  
more than human subjects;  
plurality of subjectivities  
Sensuousness and corporeality



Affecting and loving,  
caring citizens  
as opposed to or in addition to  
passive consumers?

Resilient, knowing and mindful inhabitants,  
'denizen' and 'dwellers'  
in the bioregional land',  
with cosmopolitan sensibilities

Survivalists?  
Post-Apocalyptic humanity;

Pioneers in new ways of living  
and being in the world;

A story-telling humanity,  
a mythic or post-mythic human subject;

How do we honour and express our 'storied residence'?

Embodied and ecologically embedded human subjectivities  
sustainable and resilient subjectivities;

Generosity and gratitude  
reconnecting with one another  
and the more than human world  
through food and rituals of being grateful.

Also more public commemoration  
without religious ceremony

Earthy humour  
rewilding our language,  
humanising relations through humour,  
subversive, life-affirming potential of humour,  
diffusing tension,  
pricking pomposity,  
as well as touching on the ways  
in which humour perhaps is rooted in a positive orientation towards death

Toughness and tenderness  
'holding tender views in tough ways'

A stress/return to virtue and character?  
ethics as about character  
not or in addition to rights and utilitarian calculation?

Resilient characters that recognise and respect and acknowledge  
death, suffering, illness  
as woven parts of the human condition  
and contributions to a flourishing human life

To have a 'good death' as something to be desired  
not avoided....

---

What kinds of destinies/fates are we imagining for this world and its inhabitants?

One of open or closed possibilities?

less unsustainable,  
less resilient,  
less possibilities open up  
Hopeful ones in sense of 'radical hope'

Digging where we stand,  
re-inhabiting place,  
transforming space into place

Destinies/fates  
sense of lock in,  
closed futures

What does 'home' mean  
for a species that no longer has or needs a natural niche  
and is the one species  
(perhaps with rats and cockroaches)  
nature did not specialise?

Imagination and creativity  
play,  
slack  
and redundancy

More free time  
and more labour?

Knowledge  
or love of the world?

Is it true that people cannot bear too much reality?

An erotic/life affirming angle at which to stand to the world  
the rediscovery that perhaps the great mystery is not death  
but life

Poetry,  
life affirmation,  
imagination and creativity

at the end of the world as we know it...  
but then the end of the world as we know it  
is not the end of the world.  
"Oh lightening bole, oh quickening glance,  
who can tell the dancer from the dance" Yeats

## **F. List of Films at WMC event**

1. “HWYRGAN (By the late hour): a film by Simon Whitehead, Barnaby Oliver and Philip Cowan.
2. FFynnon Dwym - Glenn Davidson
3. Daughters on the Mountain - Tanya Syed and Jess Lerner
4. Preseli Hills: Between Death and Meaning: Reuben Knutson
5. It's the Skin you're Living in: David Harradine and Fevered Sleep
6. Return to Battleship Island: Future of Ruins - Lee Hassall

## G. Keywords and Provocations Document for Final Event

### Questions

- If we view/construct the world with these concepts, what sort of world are we inhabiting?
- What sort of subjects live in it?
- What kinds of destinies/fates are we imagining for this world and its inhabitants?

### Risk and futures

Concern with/care about the uncertain future, “with the precarious and perilous character of existence”, is arguably a universal aspect of human experience (Jackson 1989, 15–17). Risk is therefore not just an administrative tool, a parameter to be assessed or measured. It is also an attitude, a practice and a kind of knowledge – a way of making sense of an uncertain future, of representing and imagining it in terms of a totality of counterfactual possibilities (Giddens 1991), as a ‘risky future’. It is also a moral concept, a way of apportioning and distributing blame for negative events – for identifying ‘risky’ behaviour (Douglas and Wildavsky, 1982).

Just like any other way of interpreting the future, however, risk deals in fictions, not facts (Jouvenel 1967). We can model or predict the future by assessing the present and quantifying the past, but until the future has become the present, we must wait for our beliefs to be confirmed, leaving a persistent gap that is ethically troubling (Haller 2002).

At the same time, these fictions that extend into the future convey emotion and affect back to the present. The risks that we view as salient for us and those we care about create spaces of possibility whose shape and character is emotionally coloured (e.g. with anger, fear, sympathy, or hope), and which shape our potential for relating to others and taking action here in the present. Fear may spur us to take responsibility for the future (Jonas, 1984) or paralyze us. Hope may create collective energy or produce utopian visions that may themselves create fear in those who see potential for injustice, exclusion or the suppression of difference within them.

### Aesthetics, emotion and affect

Emotions re-order the world around us, creating meaning out of our sensual relationship to it (Nussbaum, 2001). Art intervenes within this sensual order, which possesses its own logic, to create the possibility of new experiences. But is this process of intervention purposeful or not?

We might interpret the role of art not as producing representations of what the future might ‘look like’ (this approach being characteristic of past imaginary futures, as containing particular technologies, urban forms and so on – like the 50s retro-future of flying cars, ultra-high-rise buildings and so on (Barbrook, 2007)). Instead, the artistic imagination can intervene in our settled assumptions and habits, seeking to imagine different forms of life or ways in which life could be lived – in increased simplicity, more ‘slowly’, with more deliberate interruptions and with mindfulness as a goal (Aberystwyth event).

Alternatively, we might conceive of art as a ‘counter-ethics’ that does not so much envision different alternative futures, as directly transform practices in the present, creating places and forms of life where life is lived differently, more mindfully, more connectedly. Art may recreate connections to the world and those who share it with us by, for example, providing alternatives to the dominant narratives about places and communities identified as ‘faulty environments’ (Irwin and Simmons, 1999) by politicians and the media. The arts can perhaps help invent stories that bring out other aspects of life in these places crucial to reshaping a sense of what people can do, of what futures are possible (one example being the Gurnos estate in Merthyr Tydfil, discussed at the 16 July Cardiff Philosophy Café (CPC) as a community that has been ‘officially defamed’ in this way).



In this way, uncertainty about the future could be seen as the key resource for art, with the need to re-generate within communities the confidence and capacity to influence the future providing a major role for artistic work – particularly in the ways in which it can (as with *The Passion* and *Port Talbot*) release sleeping energies within communities. A useful distinction might be made between uncertainty about the future – a state in which one may be overwhelmed by a sense of ‘riskiness’ or simply not be sure ‘how to go on’ (Marris, 1996) – and precariousness (or ‘precarity’), the condition and awareness that the rug could be pulled out from underneath you, as it were, thanks to the actions of others, at any time. (CPC 16 July)

The role of art in relation to sustainability may have to do with overcoming disconnection and the specific emotionally-inflected states of uncertainty or precarity that it can create. Unsustainable lives are disconnected, fragmented lives, with attention pulled in different directions (Aberystwyth event). Despite this, though, there is perhaps a danger in thinking of the arts as a ‘toolbox’ for ‘re-connecting’ to those around us and the world we inhabit. As Siriol Joyner suggested in her performance at the Aberystwyth event, perhaps performance is just about ‘being in’ nature, being at home in movement, forming new ways of ‘being at home’ in the world and articulating or expressing these through different media – of participating in ‘an involuntary movement that involves us fully’ (audience member, CPC 23 July 2013).

One way of thinking about what a non-instrumentalised version of art might look like is to reflect on ‘obliqueness’ (Aberystwyth event). Whereas instrumentalised art seeks to address issues frontally, in the hope of intervening directly in a given situation, oblique art tends to approach things from the side, at an angle. With oblique art, the point is not to teach or to work towards some self-evident aim or goal; on the contrary, it is to evoke and produce different possibilities of experiencing the world in and through an encounter with the materials and structures of the artwork itself. In keeping with the thinking of Jacques Rancière (2006), the paradox here is that art which eschews all direct causes, the art that seeks to serve no purpose other than itself, might just be the most useful art we possess for rethinking our relationship to the world.

### **Sustainability, place-making, homing**

But if the arts dissolve illusions of disconnection, then do they do so in relation purely to locality, the place we are in here and now, rather than a wider, globalizing world? Are there problems with connecting sustainability, through art, to ways of life lived in particular places (Heise, 2008)? Yet attention to concrete aspects of life – in place and time – is particularly important to avoid the ‘optical illusion’ associated with fear of the future, which austerity, climate change, the possibility of energy shortages and so on may provoke. Through the lens of fear, everything looks ‘bigger’, harder to handle, unconfined within boundaries. Does a sense of place, by comparison, help creative intervention release the energy and confidence needed to live with and domesticate a risky future? Is it possible to address these issues by moving from a static notion of place to a more, dynamic and transient one, which stresses the need for practice and open-ended improvisation?

Here, concepts of ‘home’ and ‘homing’ can be important. Does art, in overcoming disconnection, create a ‘safe space’ in which creative possibilities for living can be explored without emotional or other harm – a way of creating uncertainty without risk? Perhaps this does not necessarily require a ‘home’. Just as the developmental psychology concept of secure space refers to something that individuals internalize (rather than requiring spending one’s life in the place where one is emotionally rooted), perhaps ‘homing’ rather than ‘home’ is the essence of the connection between art and sustainability. Journeying and expanding one’s ‘habitat’ may allow one to cultivate responsibility – or rather, ‘response-ability’, the capacity to feel and respond to difference, to encounters in which features of the world to which one is not accustomed might be overlooked (Aberystwyth event).